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EXCLUSIVES!

AMI JAMES THE MAN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD TALKS MIAMI INK & NY INK. AND WHEN IT COMES TO EXPLOSIVE ART THEY DON'T COME MORE VOLATILE THAN BRIAN M. VIVEROS, WHO PAINTED THIS KILLER LIMITED EDITION COVER FOR US!

WE HAVE ALSO BEEN INSPIRED TO THE MAX BY THE MIGHTY GUNNAR, TOOK A PEAK BEHIND THE WIZARD'S CURTAIN WITH FERANK DOT AND THEN WE SCOOPED SOME TIME INSIDE THE MIND OF DAVID STOUPAKIS

THEN WE HIT THE ROAD

FOR SINGAPORE AND THE BRUSSELS SHOW.

FIRE WHOLE

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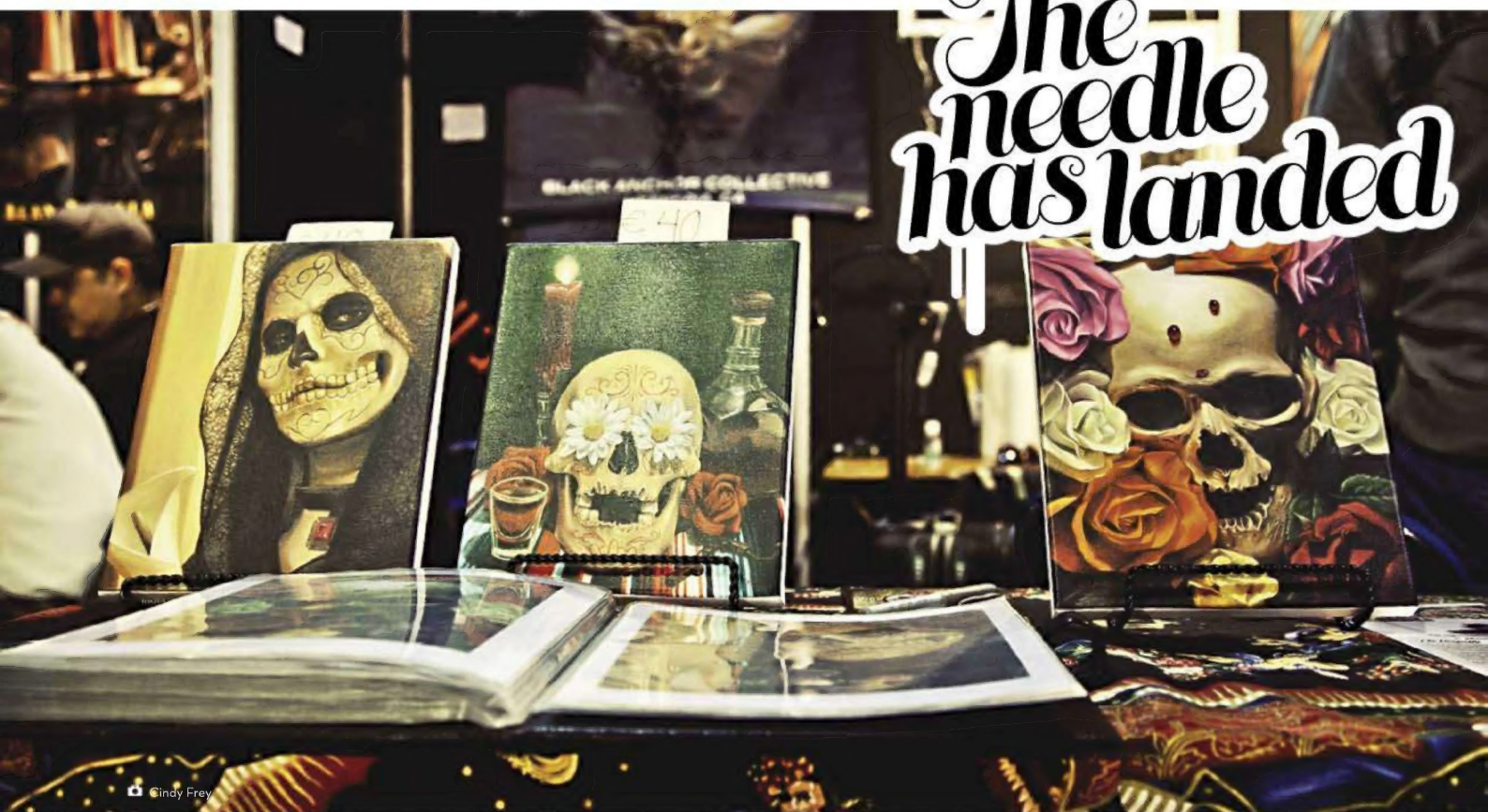
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VOICES FROM THE OTHER SIDE

S ometime last week, my ma thought it would be cool to go and see the 'world famous' psychic, Sally Morgan, with my sister. My sister had other ideas about this and emailed me a long, long diatribe wondering why people like to believe in "utter garbage" when reality is a much more worthwhile space to live in.

For the record, my sister is into science, engineering and mathematical problems. I am into magic, stories and TV scheduling problems. Despite this culture clash, we get on just fine considering our 16-odd-year age gap. A scenario in which I am older and therefore infinitely wiser. Supposedly.

I hope she won't mind me quoting her (I won't ask her in case she does), but one of her statements was: "It's like believing *The Only Way is Essex* is real" (that's an awful TV show here for the benefit of our overseas readers – and not one of the shows I have problems scheduling). "What's the

point? No one would choose to believe a lie."

Which is where she was totally wrong in every way (and so was I – I actually thought *TOWIE* was real). Can anybody honestly say they don't believe any lies at all? It's simply not possible. You probably believe that your car will be OK if it gets hit at speed by a truck or you wouldn't drive it,

sand of human events at which point we interpret 'lies' as 'hope'. A totally human state of mind that no other animal shares. No rabbit hopes there will be food today. It knows it has to go and find it, yet as humans, we are quite happy every single day to invest our futures in this 'hope'. It's hope that is the greatest defence against fear of failure. Dogs however may be

MY SISTER IS INTO SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND MATHEMATICAL PROBLEMS. I AM INTO MAGIC, STORIES AND TV SCHEDULING PROBLEMS

but you only have to take a look at the news to know that's not true. You can believe you have a job for life, but that's not true either because 'stuff' happens that involves 'other people' and it can all change in the blink of an eye. If we didn't believe these lies, there would be no point in doing anything at all for fear that it wouldn't work out at least partly in our favour.

Which is when I realised there is a really fine pencil line in the

exempt from this – have you seen their faces whenever you go to the fridge?

I've gotten off subject haven't I? Anyway, they still haven't decided whether to go or not. I tried to talk both of them into spending their money on getting some ink, but it fell on deaf ears. I backed it up with an explanation of how I see dead people every single day – getting on the bus, going to a job they hate, going home and then doing it all over again tomorrow.

My ma sarcastically threw back at me "and I suppose people with tattoos don't act like that then?" I thought about it for a while and came to the conclusion that, for the most part, no they don't. People with tattoos have a slightly different outlook on life to the 'others'.

And then I left to go home in case I had to explain myself any further, but I know what I meant – and so do you.

Sen



Mr Sion Smith

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THE USUAL SUSPECTS

SLEEVE NOTES
Always something going on – always giving something away.

CALL OF THE WILD
Best conventions to get yourself seen at this coming month.

CONVENTION LISTINGS
As comprehensive a list as we could make it before we hit the press.

WALK THIS WAY
There's movie posters and then there's movie posters – and then there's these movie posters. Take a look and be inspired!



ARTIST PROFILE GUNNAR

LAST SEPTEMBER, GUNNAR WROTE ON HIS BLOG THAT HE MADE 'A CONSCIOUS DECISION TO NO LONGER PROMOTE NEGATIVITY IN THE ART I CREATE'. A GOOD PLAN THAT ALIGNS WITH OURS. GUNNAR – WE SALUTE YOU!

FIRST BLOOD
The second in our limited series of advice for absolute beginners.

LETTERS
Time for a more interesting title for this section we think...

REVIEWS
And maybe this one as well! Always tweaking. Always thinking.

AN EYE IS UPON YOU
Stylish or have style? Good question. Only Paula could answer this properly.

THE BIG STUFF

READER PROFILE COCO
I wish my teachers had been like this at school, but alas...

ROAD TRIP THE SINGAPORE SLING
I've tried to keep him nailed down, but it's just not happening. Today Singapore. Tomorrow – who knows. Craigy-Lee gets his head around customs.

ART PROFILE DAVID STOUPAKIS
Painter, painter and painter – we like a man who is committed to his work – especially when the end results are like this.

ART PROFILE BRIAN VIVEROS
You've probably seen his art around. You might even have read a cool interview. Our mission? To put the two together and bring you a great feature on the coolest artist in the world bar none. Fact.



KAT MIGHT GET ALL THE PRESS, BUT AMI IS THE MAN WHO STARTED IT ALL OFF. GRAB A COFFEE. RELAX. YOU'RE GOING TO BE READING FOR A LONG TIME.

ARTIST PROFILE FERANK DOT
We like to call him the Alan Moore of tattooing. He doesn't know this, but he will now.

PAPERBACK WRITERS (PART II)
You may have thought you'd read every piece of tattoo-related fiction going, but we're here to tell you, there's more

THIS MONTH'S SUPPLEMENT:
SKIN SHOTS
ONLY THE VERY BEST FOR OUR READERS.

than meets the eye out there – apart from Russ who actually has read all of these because he wrote the piece.

ROAD TRIP BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL
Words and pictures from this great Belgian show. One of these days we'll figure out how to set these show reviews to music as well.

COVER CREDIT: VICTORIA VON VIOLENCE BY RALF ERLINGER PHOTOGRAPHY.
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ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES Sarah Shawcross advertising@skindeep.co.uk 01244 663400 ext. 301	ADMINISTRATION Jan Schofield jan@jazzpublishing.co.uk 01244 663400 ext. 219	ADVERTISING & EVENTS MANAGER Shelley Bond shelley@jazzpublishing.co.uk 01244 663400 ext. 303	WEB MANAGER David Arthur david.arthur@jazzpublishing.co.uk 01244 663400 ext. 208	CIRCULATION & PROMOTIONS Katy Cuffin katy@jazzpublishing.co.uk 01244 663400 Ext. 237	MANAGING DIRECTOR Stuart Mears stuart@jazzpublishing.co.uk 01244 663400	Having trouble finding Skin Deep magazine in your newsagent? Please contact our distribution company for your nearest outlet 0207 429 4073.

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Sleeve Notes

twitter.com/skindeepmag www.facebook.com/tattoomagazine

ALL SUBMISSIONS TO SLEEVE NOTES GRATEFULLY RECEIVED. BE IT NEWS, AN EVENT, NEW MERCH, A STUDIO MOVE... WE'LL DO OUR VERY BEST TO LET EVERYBODY ELSE KNOW ABOUT IT TOO. EMAIL: EDITOR@SKINDEEP.CO.UK OR IF YOU WANT TO BE ARCHAIC ABOUT THE WHOLE AFFAIR: SKIN DEEP, THE OLD SCHOOL, HIGHER KINNERTON, CHESTER CH4 9AJ. BRING IT.



NICE SLEEVE!

It's just a shame it's not real – because that would be impressive, very cool and give us carte blanche to hunt Rihanna down for an interview. So before we get a sackload of mail about it, the pic comes from the new movie, *Battleship* (out on April 11). Based (loosely) on the cracking board game we all loved as kids, the basic premise is of aliens coming to build a power source in the ocean and their relationship with the battleship they come across. The film shows both sides of the story, the aliens' perspective, as well as the humans', so that the audience knows exactly where the opponent's ships are... clever. Anyway – that's something to do next month, a gratuitous picture of Rihanna and a decent job on taking tattoo into the mainstream. Our work here is done!

SHORT SLEEVES

JEKYLL & HYDE

Guest artist, Matt Drury, of Art and Soul Tattoo, Plymouth, will be guest-spotting at Jekyll & Hyde Tattoo Company, Rugby, from April 9-14. Matt specialises in realism, wildlife and horror tattoos; he will be joined by Jessie James, also of Art and Soul Tattoo. Art and Soul Tattoo. Contact Jekyll & Hyde either through Facebook or email: jekyll_hyde_tattoo@hotmail.co.uk.

BOURNEMOUTH SHOW: AN APOLOGY

It has recently come to our attention that our convention listings have been displaying the Bournemouth Convention as being held at the International Convention Centre, when this year it is in fact being held at the O2 Academy. That will teach us to pay attention when things change! The show takes place at the O2 Academy, Bournemouth on May 26-27, 2012.

COULEY'S TAT2

Martin Couley has opened a second sister studio, Couley's Tat2 in Saltwell Road, Gateshead. Artists Martin Couley, Jamie Mac, Martin Robson, Lil Si, and Richie Guy are working between both studios, covering a whole range of styles, specialising in realism, colour, black and grey, neo traditional, and organic bio.

ZOMBIES WANTED

We recently had the modern day equivalent of a telegram sent in. It read as follows: 'Spread the word. Comedy horror movie *Zombie Women of Satan 2* is shooting this summer. We already have a UK DVD distribution deal for it and global sales representation. Any girls (especially with tattoos) wishing to be considered as zombies please email info@growlingclown.com with brief info and pix.'

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Over at Medway Tattoo in Rochester, you'll now find Jim Mitchell (ex-Blood Brothers) and Paul O'Leary (ex-Black Rose) have now started work in their newly refurbished studio. The guys are spinning their wheels (seven days a week no less) and are ready to roll. Check in with them on 01634 828866.



SKULL & BONES GIVEAWAY

We're on a roll. Lately you'd think we were on a mission to clothe the world. This issue, we've got 25 limited edition Skull and Bones Boys Club Tees to give away in an easier than easy competition – you won't find these anywhere else other than in this competition either, so if you're liking what you see, be swift! Whip an email over to editor@skindeep.co.uk with the subject line of 'SKULL & BONE', and we'll draw some lucky hamsters out of the spinning wheel. Don't forget to check out their other merch over at www.skullandbonesboysclub.com.

SHORT SLEEVES



PLANET TATTOO

New Studio, Planet Tattoo is the home of accredited artist Stevie T., Daz B. and European artist, Lukasz. The studio boasts 1,000s of flash designs and offers unique, one-off custom pieces. Totally noteworthy here is their waiting area which offers large LCD TVs, free tea, coffee and WiFi. Visit www.planettattoo.co.uk or 07928501536.



RANDOM READER

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

This month, we have a lil submission from Living Colour tattoo: "We did a photo shoot with one of our customers and a company called KillShot Photography last week and got some great pictures to show off our work. We went for a twisted Alice and Wonderland

theme and then hit them with some nifty black and white/ colour editing."

Photography by KillShot, ink by Rob Collins of Living Colour, model, Donna Fury. Check out the studio here: www.livingcolour.biz.

HANNYA MASK PROJECT
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Name: Robert Baker and Travis Estrada
HANNYA MASK PROJECT

A few months back we got involved with The Hannya Mask Project that was set up by Ant Iannucci of Ascension Tattoo out in Florida. It was arranged for the benefit of the Japanese people who got caught up in the earthquake out there back in 2011. To put it in perspective for you, the count of dead or missing people was 22,000 with an estimated 100,000 children left homeless. That's off the scale for most of us to even comprehend, and

it will take years to get them back on their feet – if ever, particularly now it has gone out of the public eye.

The bidding is now done and dusted on the final masks that went up for auction. You can see all of the final masks here at www.hannymaskproject.com. And we're also pretty stoked that out of this little project, Ant managed to raise \$5,282.61 to hand over to the Red Cross. Nice work Mr Iannucci!

Conventions

All details correct at time of going to press.

DOMESTIC SHOWS

April 14-15

NORTH LAKES TATTOO SHOW

The Shepherds Inn, Carlisle, Cumbria, England
www.northlaketattoooshow.co.uk
northlaketattoooshow@aol.com
 01228 545156

April 14-15

2ND TATTOO EXTRAVAGANZA

The Pyramid Centre, The Seafront, Southsea
 Hampshire, England
www.tattooextravaganza.co.uk
tattooextravaganza@live.co.uk
 Tel: Reno on 07907 009161

April 21-22

GREAT BRITISH TATTOO SHOW

London Olympia
www.greatbritishtattoooshow.com

May 12-13

PLYMOUTH TATTOO CONVENTION

Guildhall, Plymouth, Devon, England
www.plymouthtattooconvention.co.uk

May 12-13

TITANIC INK

St Mary's Football Stadium, Southampton
 Hampshire, England
www.titanic-ink.co.uk

May 19-20

NORTHAMPTON INTERNATIONAL TATTOO CONVENTION

Saints Rugby Ground, Weedon Road
 Northampton, NN5 5BG
www.northamptoninternationaltattooconvention.com
 Tel: Nigel Barden, Suns & Roses Tattoos
 01604 949958

May 26-27

BOURNEMOUTH TATTOO CONVENTION

02 Academy, Bournemouth
 570 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth,
 Dorset, BH1 4BH
www.bournemouthtattooconvention.com
www.o2academybournemouth.co.uk

June 9-10

MK TATTOO CONVENTION

Milton Keynes, England
www.mktattooconvention.co.uk

June 9-10

PERTH TATTOOWAR

Salutation Hotel, Perth

June 9-10

READING TATTOO SHOW

Rivermead Leisure Complex, Reading
 Berkshire, England
www.readingtattoooshow.co.uk
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readingtattoooshow@hotmail.co.uk

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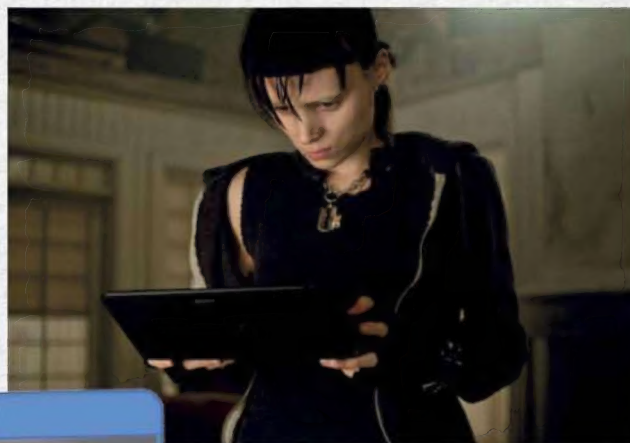
Completely redesigned for iPad, this beautiful piece of work (designed in-house by our regular guys with the assistance of a particularly sharp stick) is available right now – simply search the **apple newsstand** and you'll find it soon enough. The app itself is free while the magazine clocks in at a cool **£2.99** – which is where our overseas readers will jump for joy. That means it's available to read on the same day as it is in the UK and for a fraction of the price of normal exports. And all from the comfort of wherever you happen to be sitting.



While you're busy checking that out, we'll be busy pushing it different directions over the coming months and seeing what we can do with it. Stay tuned for details...

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO GIVEAWAY!

We've teamed up with Sony Pictures Home Entertainment to celebrate the launch of The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo, out on Blu-ray and DVD on 23rd April, and in the spirit of sharing we're giving you a shot at grabbing yourself one of five copies of the film on Blu-ray.



The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo is a film adaptation of the first instalment of Stieg Larsson's literary blockbuster The Millennium Trilogy. Directed by David Fincher and starring Daniel Craig and Rooney Mara, the film is based on the first novel in the trilogy, which altogether have sold 50 million copies in 46 countries and became a worldwide phenomenon.

To be in with a shot at this, send an email to editor@skindeep.co.uk with the subject line DRAGON TATTOO and we'll do the rest. Meantime, if you've not been out of the house or looked at any media for the last two years, you can find a review of the movie on page 97.

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HIT THE ROAD JACK

THE CALL OF THE WILD



NORTHAMPTON TATTOO CONVENTION MAY 19-20, SAINTS RUGBY GROUND, NORTHAMPTON

I'M NOT SURE WHERE THAT IS. Then you should have gone to school that day. It's about halfway between Nottingham and London. Hit the M1 and you can't miss it... May 19-20 in case you missed it the first time.

GOOD ARTIST LINE-UP? For sure. Bob Tyrrell, John Anderton, ABH, Dan Gold (your host for the weekend) – to be honest, the list is way too long to pitch it in here so check it out yourself at northamptoninternationaltattooconvention.com. You'll find dozens of reasons to make the weekend free.

CAN YOU BACK IT UP? Yep – there's the awesome Wall of Death team making an appearance, an awesome Help for Heroes auction and a brilliant circus-themed drawing competition for kids, so that's them taken care of while you're busy doing other things!



PORTSMOUTH TATTOO EXTRAVANGANZA APRIL 14-15, PYRAMIDS CENTRE, SOUTHSEA



WHAT WAS THE DATE AGAIN? 14-15 April in Southsea, which is spitting distance from Portsmouth itself.

ANYTHING REMARKABLE GOING ON TO SPEAK OF? Hell yeah – they've only gone and booked in Cecil Porter, Joe Capobianco, Lal Hardy, Dan Smith and Shotsie Gorman. For a full artist list, check out the site at tattooxtravaganza.co.uk – but if that isn't enough to whet your appetite, you're a lost cause.

FREE ENTRY? Nope, but weekend tickets are priced well and selling fast. The event is also supporting Help for Heroes, so everyone's a winner!

ANYTHING ELSE TO KNOW? Sure... isn't there always? There's burlesque, cool bands, and with this great artist list, there's sure to be some stiff competition at the end of the weekend!

TITANIC INK

MAY 12-13, ST MARY'S FOOTBALL STADIUM, SOUTHAMPTON

TITANIC? There's no sinking this show. Being only their second year, it's one of the hottest and fastest growing shows on the south coast. For a full artist list, head over to titanic-ink.co.uk, but to give you some clues; Sam Boyce from Timeless is on board, as are the guys at Poison Ink, Broken Heart's Jason Ling, Monki Do, No Regrets, and Derek Nelson – a veritable hot list of the some of the best artists in the UK right now.

NICE JOINT? Hell yeah – the football stadium is a great place for a show. There were some killer bikes on show last year. This year, Deezil, The Fire Girls, and The Lab along with their mini-ramp will be flaunting their wares. Oh, and some street magic too. Can't go wrong!



Conventions

All details correct at time of going to press.

June 23-24

INK FOR HEROES

York Racecourse, York, England
www.inkforheroes.co.uk
inkforheroes@hotmail.co.uk

June 29-July 2

INKFEST – A FESTIVAL OF TATTOO ART & ALTERNATIVE MUSIC

Woolacombe Bay Holiday Park, Devon
www.inkfest.co.uk

June 30-July 1

BELFAST YEAR OF THE DRAGON

Hilton Belfast hotel
 4 Lanyon Place, Belfast, N. Ireland
www.belfastyearofthedragon.com

July 7-8

DARE VALLEY INK 'N' IRON

Michael Sobell Sports Centre, Aberdare
 South Wales
www.darevalleyinkniron.co.uk

July 28-29

PORTSMOUTH TATTOO CONVENTION

Portsmouth Guildhall, Portsmouth, England
www.portsmouthtattooconvention.com

August 4-5

MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL TATTOO SHOW

Manchester Central
www.manchestertattooshow.com

August 12

SOMERSET TAT2 CONVENTION

Bridgwater Sports & Social Club
 Bridgwater, Somerset
 01278 439569

August 18-19

NORWICH BODYART FESTIVAL

St Andrews Hall, Norwich, Norfolk, England
www.norwichbodyartfestival.co.uk

August 24-26

MAIDEN CITY INK TATTOO CONVENTION

St Columbs Hall, Orchard Street, Derry City
 N. Ireland
 Info: Zac at Skin Art Tattoo, 02871 363076
maidencityink@aol.com

September 28-30

LONDON TATTOO CONVENTION

Tobacco Dock, Porters Walk, London, E1W 2SF
www.thelondontattooconvention.com

October 12-14

TATTOO JAM

Doncaster Racecourse
www.tattoojam.com

SEE ALL INTERNATIONAL
SHOWS ON NEXT PAGE

WALK THIS WAY

MOVIE POSTER MAGIC

There's this place, miles away from us, in Austin, Texas (which actually might not be so far from where you are), where a few weeks back, they hosted one of the most amazing exhibitions we've never been to – but via the magic of the internet device, we didn't miss out totally



The Mondo Gallery looks like a fine, fine place to be – particularly on this day in history when they exhibited some of the greatest artists in the world's interpretations of their favourite movie posters.

Let's see, there was *The Wrath of Kahn* which got a reworking by Tyler Stout, Jason Edmiston came out swinging with an acrylic of *Flash Gordon*, then there was *The Mummy* from Martin Ansín. The list is not endless, but it's pretty damn extensive that's for sure.

This new gallery opening is an artistic endeavour Mondo has been striving towards for years. More events are being planned for Mondo's gallery space in the future, and, with them, more magnificent works of art are sure to be seen, purchased and displayed. For more posters and to check out stuff you can buy from this collection as well, visit: blog.mondotees.com or follow @mondonews.



WHICH GOT US TO THINKING...

These guys are incredible, but we've seen what tattoo artists are capable of too. If there are artists out there, apprentices, flash workers – or even just fans of reimagining cultural icons, let me know at editor@skindeep.co.uk – I have a plan that just might be brilliant in which we can exhibit some greatness of our own at Tattoo Jam, have some fun, and raise some money for a yet-to-be-determined good cause. Anybody game?

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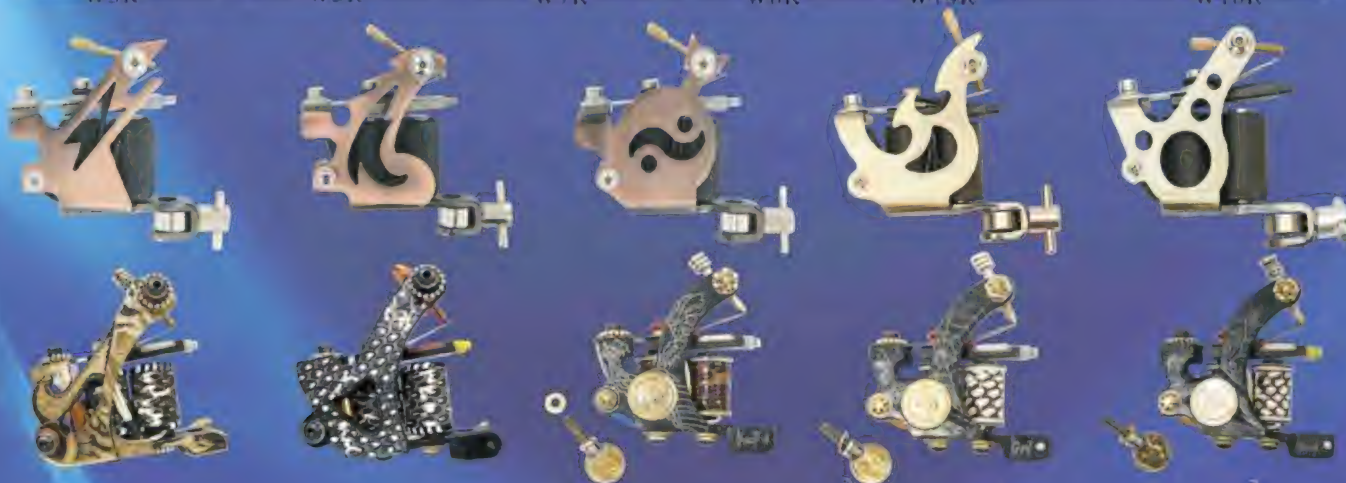
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www.facebook.com/rhodeislandtattooexpo

April 27-28

rites of passage

Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne, Australia
www.ritesofpassagefestival.com

May 4-6

ROMA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

Ergrife Palace Hotel, Via Aurelia 619, Roma, Italy
www.tattooexporoma.com

May 4-6

COPENHAGEN INK FESTIVAL

Tap 1, NY Carlsberg VEJ 91, 1738
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www.inkfest.dk

May 19-20

INTERNATIONAL NEEDLE ART CONVENTION

Bress Sportcenter, Breda, The Netherlands
www.needle-art.nl

May 19-20

ALCHEMY TATTOO EXPO

Salle Polyvalente, 1964 Conthey, Switzerland
www.alchemy-tattoo-expo.ch

May 26-27

SUMMER INK FEST

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www.summerinkfest.be
info@summerinkfest.be

June 1-3

AMSTERDAM TATTOO CONVENTION

RAI Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands
www.tattooexpo.eu

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KRAKOW TATTOOFEST

Klimeckiego 14, Krakow, Poland
www.tattoofest.pl

June 15-17

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Expo hotel valencia
www.valenciatattooconvention.com
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September 7-9

6TH CASTELLON TATTOO CONVENTION

Recinto La Pergola - Paseo Ribalta
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November 23-25

BRUSSELS TATTOO CONVENTION

Tours & Taxis, Brussels, Belgium
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PAUL SWEENEY



THE FUTURE'S VINTAGE

"What the hell is he talking about this time?
The Future's Vintage?" "Stop living in the past mate!"

I thought this month it would be appropriate to open with a couple of lines from the two condescending cockney's that live inside my head.

Obviously, not what you'd call a typical start

to an article in a tattoo magazine, but then I'm not what most people would refer to as a typical person.

I was always taught as a child never to judge a book by its cover, unless it doesn't have a cover, in which case it's probably a newspaper, and I'm sure we're all aware of how they're to be judged! I digress. The point I'm rather clumsily trying to make is, image. No more than in the world of body modification do people really take control of their image, choosing to permanently, and quite often painfully, display the truest representation of their personality upon their person.

I'm a vintage enthusiast, from the clothes I wear to the music I listen to, the films I enjoy and the tattoos that I have. These are all things that play an essential part in making me who I am. I rather blissfully, in the comfort of my own home, exist in a world of influence, spanning a 50-year period, starting close to my Grandfather's birth, and ending a good ten years before my own. But occasionally I'm forced emerge from my vintage bubble

and embrace the reality of living in a modern world, where most of the people like me, are not most of the people.

Despite feeling perfectly comfortable on stage, where most 'normal' people

wouldn't dare to tread through fear of failure or rejection, I gleefully parody myself as a tattooed time travelling musketeer of comedy. In all honesty I feel a far greater level of judgement from the occasional furtive eye followed by the impending whispers among strangers, than I've ever felt telling jokes to strangers in bars and clubs.

Irrespective of how we present ourselves as humans, whether we choose as individuals to wear our personality every day, or only truly express ourselves behind closed doors, on a stage or just at the weekends, or whenever our social calendar will allow. Even the seemingly most confident ones of us feel a little self conscious every

now and then; after all, we are only human! For those of you who, despite the ignorance of others, celebrate their personality boldly and aren't afraid to be themselves, I stand high upon my vintage furniture and raise my 'Carry On Camping' coffee cup in your honour. You are all individuals, but you are not alone!



I'M A VINTAGE ENTHUSIAST,
FROM THE CLOTHES I WEAR
TO THE MUSIC I LISTEN TO,
THE FILMS I ENJOY AND THE
TATTOOS THAT I HAVE

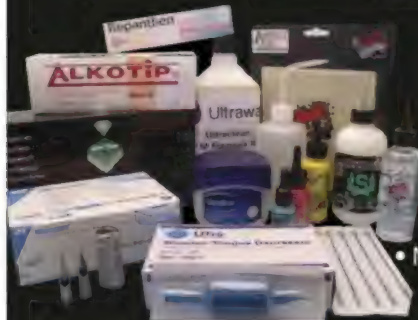
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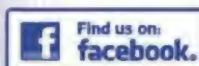


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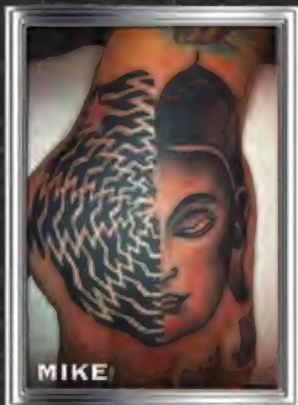
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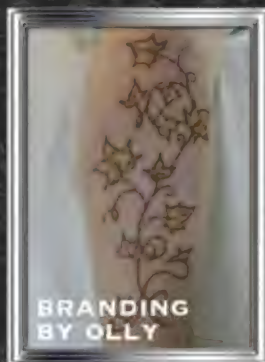
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CUSTOM VS FLASH

Most of us can remember when all you got your first time round, was flash – well, those of us over 30 at least. These last few years have made custom ink the thing to hunt down. Both are fine and totally solid in their grounding. Let's elaborate a little further.

There seems to be some opinion in the world at the moment that being a flash artist is not quite so cool as being a custom artist, but that's not true. Great flash artists are the backbone of the walk-in tattoo scene, and though you're unlikely to find them flooding convention booths on an international scale, they occupy the majority of high street studios that you'll find in the UK and provide the best foundation for any tattooist to move on to other things.

When you're choosing flash from a rack or book, the question you need to ask yourself is, do you really want the same thing as somebody else? Unless of course, you're entering into some kind of blood brother pact. Even a deviation in colour or shading can make a difference to the work, but you'll need to ask up front what your tattooist can do for you in this context.

What you do tend to find with dedicated flash artists is that they are fabulous technicians. Doing similar things time and again can only make you better at it. Our advice is to not simply look through flash books on display, but to actually see some real world work from whoever you choose. Skin Deep is very focused on custom work. To

say we were 100 percent into it would not be a lie. That's mostly because working with flash would mean publishing the same type of work time and time again, which we can all agree is probably the fastest way down for any magazine. We think custom work at its best, is the pinnacle of tattooing. It's amazing! And that's down to

two simple things. At the top end of the scale, it involves a tattoo artist with vision and talent combined with you, the client, giving said artist a good briefing and trusting them to do whatever they wish with the idea. There are no losers in this scenario, but patience is all. These days, you can converse internationally with any artist.

To give you a real world example, I'm currently working on a half sleeve that was six months in the talking before we even started. That was almost a year ago and we're still far from finished, but when you both know what the end result will be, it's worth every second.

Ultimately, it is of course up to you – just make sure that it's absolutely the very best that you can afford because you will get what you pay for.

For the record, we tend to call those who deal in flash work, tattooists, and those who deal in custom work, tattoo artists. Just in case there was any confusion.

THE QUESTION YOU NEED TO ASK YOURSELF
IS, DO YOU REALLY WANT THE SAME THING AS
SOMEBODY ELSE?



Joe Riley Club Tattoo Las Vegas

THE COVER-UP

There are a dozens of reasons to think about a cover-up. Most of them genuine, some maybe not quite so much, but regardless, the opportunity does exist to correct or improve on a previous tattoo if you really think it necessary.

The alternative to a cover-up is laser treatment. While laser can eradicate all manner of sins, it's not a magical eraser with all tattoos – neither is it cheap. What it can do, is 'rub-out' enough of a tattoo to allow new work to be put in its place without the original having to be worked around, but that's a whole article in itself. The cover-up is the opposite.

On a good day, a clever cover-up can be pulled seemingly from nowhere. With the skills of a

great tattoo artist, all manner of things can be adjusted. Basically – and it may seem rather obvious once out in the open – you can't go smaller than the original tattoo and you can't lay light colours over dark and expect them to work. They simply won't.

What you can do is take your body to a studio and talk about it. Don't post a picture on Facebook and hope for the best, but get a proper consultation. You wouldn't take a picture of a tooth that needed fixing and mail it in, so why would you with a tattoo (which is probably more important vanity-wise to 99 percent of us anyway)? We've seen some amazing cover-ups in our time here, and the best of the best are indiscernible. And that comes from being clever

FOR BIGGER OR AWKWARDLY SHAPED TATTOOS, BLACK MAY BE YOUR BEST FRIEND. AND IN THE RIGHT HANDS IT CAN LOOK PRETTY DAMN CLASSY TOO



and taking your time.

Generally speaking, to cover-up something small, you have more than a few options available to you. For bigger or awkwardly shaped tattoos, black may be your best friend. And in the right hands it can look pretty damn classy too.

If you're wondering why those guys you see with the faded and sometimes blotchy blue naval

tattoos don't get them covered up, well that's a whole different conversation which brings us on to the difference between the modern day collector and those whose tattoos are mementos of a time and place in their lives. Just because your kids didn't grow up quite as you envisaged, doesn't mean you should disown them. 🐼

**NEXT ISSUE WE LOOK AT
GETTING TATTOOED AT A SHOW & THOSE PESKY SCRATCHERS!**

FROM THE INTERNATIONAL
BEST-SELLING TRILOGY



DANIEL CRAIG ROONEY MARA



THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO

OUT 23RD APRIL

the teacher

Coco Fierce was born Haili Hughes in the northern town of Warrington, a place she describes as “a large town with somewhat of a small town mentality”

The eldest of eight children, Coco recalls being a bit of a loner as a child, “I always felt quite different because where they were quite boisterous and running around being typical children; I used to be sitting and reading books, or writing. I just constantly had a pad and used to sit and write stories.” So from an early age her love for the written word was born, and from that moment on Coco felt that it would be her way out of Warrington.

Those who like to consider themselves ‘out of the norm’ in Warrington will travel to either Manchester or Liverpool to find excitement. Despite Warrington having a history of being a town with plenty of character, sadly in modern times it has begun to look like everywhere else. “All of the individual family-run shops, and all the quirky things about it have gone. It’s got its shopping mall now and all the same shops as everywhere else.” Coco attended Catholic school, and remembers from a very young age wanting to be different, but it wasn’t until sixth form college when she could finally be who she wanted to be. She started to get into bands like Nirvana and to hang out with the types of people who listened to that kind of music. Then, at 16, she got her first tattoo – a butterfly which she now describes simply as, “horrible”. Her and a group of friends all went to get one done, despite them all being underage. “I remember coming home to say to my mum that I had a tattoo and my mum thought I was lying.

Then she had a look and I was in big trouble!”

For Coco, journalism filled her with excitement; she liked the glamour of it. As her dream was to write about showbiz, she started to look for experience in the field. After doing a lot of unpaid work experience writing

interview somebody of importance in your local area in less than 50 words. I think they were trying to weed out who could write tabloid-style basically.”

Warrington suffered an IRA bombing in 1993 that resulted in the death of a young boy and a teenager. On interviewing the father of the teenager,

she was unsurprised to find that he had an extremely compelling story to tell. Not only had he been working hard to help with the peace process, but he had even shaken the hands of people in the IRA. Despite it being all in all quite a gruelling process, News of the World paid for her to go down for her interview. “I had a first class ticket on the train and I thought I’d made it already – there were even free pretzels!” After a tough round of interviewing with various editors, six of them were narrowed down to three, and Coco went back a week later. What awaited her was a half-hour interview with Andy Coulson, then editor. Despite him putting her on the spot and asking her questions about politics (for which she had no idea at the time), she managed to give him the answer she felt he would most like... “he asked me about the referendum on the European Union and I was asking myself ‘what would the News of

the World say?!” and so I was like, ‘well, I think England should be England and I don’t want anything European and the pound is great, blah blah blah...’. And he loved it!”

A couple of days later Coco was given the position, so after graduating



for local listings guides amongst other things, she applied for a trainee scholarship at the News of the World. At 21 and almost out of university her opportunity had finally come. Part of the procedure for applying for the role was to write a story. “You had to



Rob Wigley Photography

I REMEMBER MY FIRST DAY TEACHING,
I REMEMBER THE KIDS STARING AT ME.
I WAS MUCH BIGGER THEN AND I WAS
ALREADY COVERED IN TATTOOS, AND
I DON'T THINK THE KIDS COULD QUITE
BELIEVE WHAT THEY WERE SEEING

from university in Leeds, moved down to London. The first week she was there, she stayed in a hostel before finding a flat in Golders Green. She discovered a world she'd never seen before; where she had found Warrington to be very insular and lacking in cultural diversity, London was quite the opposite. "I just thought it was amazing, it was so cosmopolitan, so different, so busy. Shops were open for 24 hours. I found it completely crazy – kinda scary, but exciting at the same time." Over the course of her time in London she moved to various

I HAD A FIRST CLASS TICKET ON THE TRAIN AND I THOUGHT I'D MADE IT ALREADY – THERE WERE EVEN FREE PRETZELS!

places, before finally ending up settling in Greenwich when she started to be paid more.

Coco stayed with the News of the World for two years, which coincidentally was the length of her graduate traineeship. It never turned out to be what she hoped it would be and felt that they thought that about her too. Ultimately it wasn't going to work for both parties. "The

News of the World was so corporate and you had to be the kind of character that was going to bend over. I was starting to get quite sick of it at that point and some of the things that I had to do there were totally against

my morals and my conscience. I remember being told to knock on the doors of people whose kids were missing around the time of the London bombings, and trying to get into the hospital where George Best was dying to try to get pictures or speak to relatives. They're just two examples of the horrible things I was asked to do. At first I did them because I was terrified by those in charge. They would insinuate that there were thousands of young people snapping at my ankles trying to get my job and that I was lucky."

Coco hadn't had a holiday in two years and so she booked one over Christmas to go and see her dad in Glasgow. She turned her phone off simply because she wanted the luxury of not being on-call, and having a break from a job which was becoming harder and harder to enjoy. When she eventually turned it on, she was disturbed to find some of the most disgraceful messages she'd ever heard. She rang them up and the managing editor explained that the features editor had told him that she hadn't booked the holiday, despite Coco clearly remembering filling in all the relevant paperwork which had at this point 'miraculously disappeared.'

"What is becoming clear to the public about the News of the World being a

really nasty, masochistic,

male-dominated place to work, is something I have known for years, and everybody that has ever been there has known for years. I just wanted to get out, and so I did." Next, Coco spent some time at The Sunday People which she enjoyed a lot more, finding the staff there to be considerably more nurturing. After a year there, she started freelancing, but was already at the point of beginning to think about doing something else.

She moved back to the northwest, started a family, and after a short time at the BBC made the decision to start a PGCE. Coco completed the PGCE with her newborn baby, Hendrix, more often than not screaming in the background. "I remember my first day teaching, I remember the kids staring at me. I was much bigger then, I was already covered in tattoos, and I don't think the kids could quite believe what they were seeing. They love it now though, they think I'm really funky." Often, Coco will be out shopping and find herself approached by the parents of her students to tell her how much their kids love having her as a teacher. But despite the parents being supportive, she is under no illusions as to what some people may think. "Wherever you go there are going to be people who are prejudiced against you regardless of what your career is. If I did get any negative feedback, I'd just answer it with 'well I'm a good teacher, isn't that what matters?'"

Around 18 months ago, Coco was around 17 stone. "I remember it culminating at a year 11 prom, the

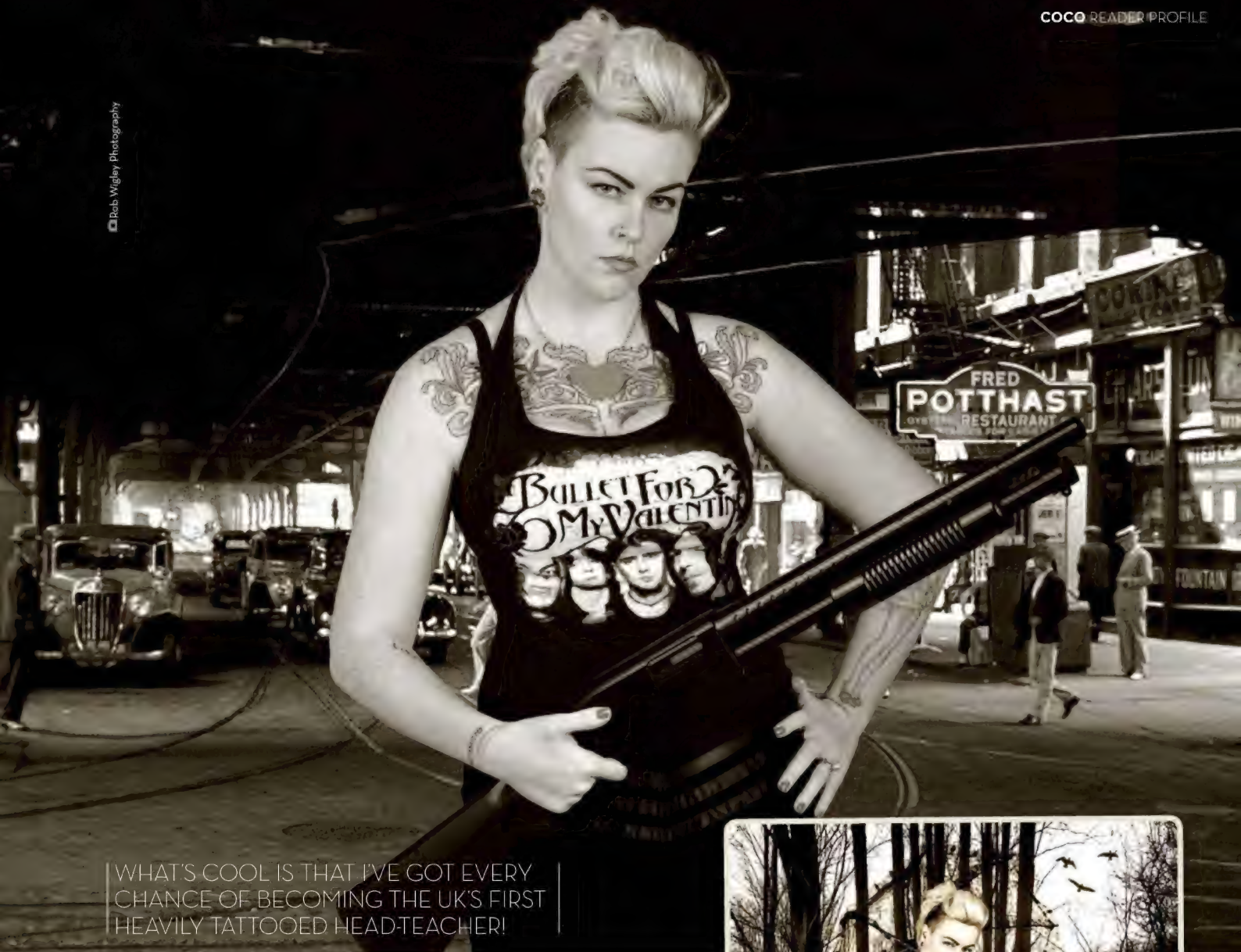


Lee at Obtainable Beauty



Paul Caslin at TA Studio

Rob Wigley Photography



WHAT'S COOL IS THAT I'VE GOT EVERY CHANCE OF BECOMING THE UK'S FIRST HEAVILY TATTOOED HEAD-TEACHER!

August before last. I had this black ball dress which was a size 24. I just could not believe how big I was. When people started to put pictures up on facebook from the prom, there was this one where one of the kids made me do a rock sign and make a really punk-rock face. And I'm not joking, I look absolutely hideous in the photo – 25 chins. I looked like Peter Griffin from *Family Guy*!" Weight Watchers was joined and the pounds started dropping off in no time at all. She wasn't even exercising, just dieting. Now she does a seven km run every week, boxing, and zumba, to maintain her healthy weight.

At the Coventry tattoo show, Coco was getting her thigh tattooed when someone suggested to her that she should go into alternative modelling. She had always had a rockabilly look

and was already living the lifestyle, so she decided to give it a go. She posted pictures and a profile up on Model Mayhem and within a few weeks had 20 shoots booked. Eventually Spirit Model Management took her on and she has since started modelling for various alternative labels. "I've been published in a couple of magazines, but *Skin Deep* will be my biggest so far, it's an absolute honour. When I started, my main ambition was to get into a tattoo magazine. I think tattoos are a moment in time, I think they tell a story. So even though the small ones I have are really naff and of a crap quality, and don't really mean anything, it reminds me of times I've had, and maybe the person that I was. But what's cool is that I've got every chance of becoming the UK's first heavily tattooed head-teacher!" 🐾



Rob Wigley Photography

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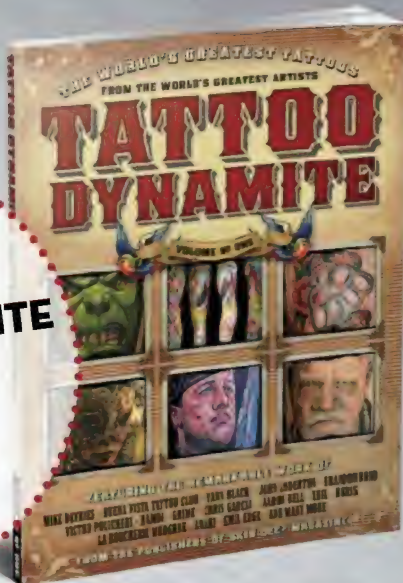
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THE SINGAPORE SLING

As I fly over the tiny island of Singapore, I look out below and see a sea sparkling with the lights of cargo ships reflecting in the water. Over the last two centuries the island has served as a port for many countries, both commercial and military. Some things in life just need investigating



by Craig Lee

Navy ports and army towns have always been where tattooing has thrived, there is a strong bond that goes back many years. In Hawaii for example, Sailor Jerry was well known to have a queue of eager servicemen out the front of his shop and down the street when a ship was in port. Similarly, Singapore has its own tattoo legend, Johnny Two Thumbs. Sadly, over the years the history and name have become somewhat muddled and confused by imitators and family members. So one of my aims whilst in the country was to get to the bottom of

the tales and separate the myth from the reality, but that will have to wait.

We arrive late in the evening to a humidity so thick I feel like I'm walking through soup and all I can think about is sleep. We jump on the underground from the airport, which delivers us straight to Chinatown where I will be tattooing at Galaxy with Niccku Hori and his team. We are met by the lovely Louise and taken to our hotel where we dump our bags and fall into a sweet slumber that only a full 24 hours of travelling can warrant.

We wake up early to explore and discover that the city is extremely

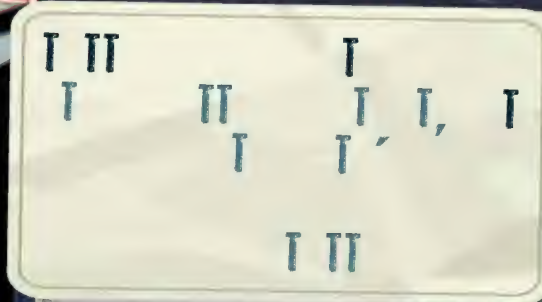
multi-cultural. Beautiful Buddhist temples and Indian Mosques are sandwiched between the bustling stalls of Chinatown. Hawker food centres, which cater for more local tastes and budgets, are a must visit and offer every type of food you could ever want for, while the Raffles Hotel and City Hall areas still have their old English colonial charm and the reclaimed land around the marina give the city its 21st century face.

Singapore is a strict place to say the least. Chewing gum is illegal, and there are hefty fines for littering and for pretty much anything else you

The Tooth Relic Temple



Enjoying a Singapore sling
at Raffles Hotel



can think of. Tattooing here still has a stigma attached to it, not helped by the city's gang members who are visually very heavily tattooed. The government in turn has a disliking of tattooing, the first Singapore tattoo magazine lasted three issues before it was banned, and the organisers of last years tattoo convention were not allowed to advertise the show anywhere in the city. Regardless, I settle into Galaxy Tattoo where I am doing a few days work. The shop is in the heart of Chinatown where it was set up by Niccku as a custom shop, with Colin, Shawn and Louise, making up the rest of the crew. It's a fun studio to spend some time in with a good vibe.

Niccku himself is well travelled having worked many conventions overseas and travelling to Japan multiple times to be tattooed by Horiyoshi III. As a result, the studio has had many guest artists from around the world; Jo Harrison, Lionel from Out

Of Step in France, Davey from Poland, and New Zealander, Sam Rulz, have all been through the doors recently. Nick specialises in Asian influenced art and does a lot of large-scale work, mostly back pieces and body suits, which in the flesh are amazingly executed. Perfect line weights, soft grey shading and bright colours are created, and because of this, Galaxy has become one of the most well-known studios in Singapore for this style.

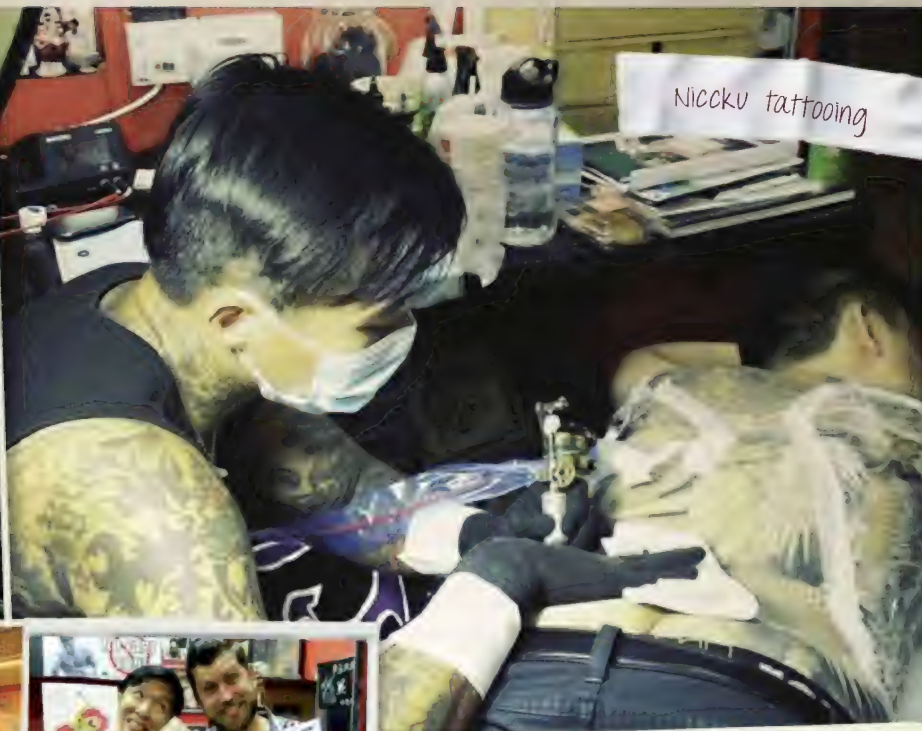
Which brings me back to the Johnny Two Thumbs story. The tattoo studio today resides inside Far-East Shopping Plaza, a shopping mall housing eight other tattoo shops. I meet with an extremely friendly and welcoming Lionel, who has been tattooing in Singapore for the last 15 years, and for the past year at Johnny Two Thumbs. He is well travelled and has just returned from Perth, Australia. Lionel is an excellent host for the day, keen to share his knowledge of Singapore's



tattooing culture with us. We enter the shop and meet Jaws and Chak, the studio's co-owners, and sit down to set about the business of trying to get to the bottom of the man and legend that is, Johnny Two Thumbs.

Johnny Two Thumbs, whose real name was Indra Bahadur, was born in Nepal and worked in India until the end of World War II. He moved to Singapore in 1942 and opened a trophy engraving shop on Bras Bazar Road with a tattoo studio at the rear. Tattooing at the time was still very taboo, so his main clientele were the army and navy soldiers still stationed

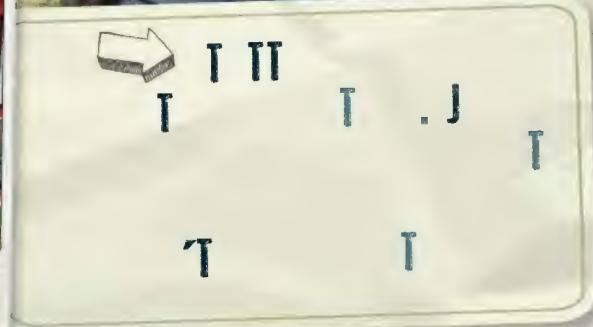




Monks inside the Tooth Relic Temple



Me with Niccku Hori



Johnny Two Thumbs

in the country. It is interesting that throughout his working career, his shop was in fact called 'Lucky's Store' – he picked up his nickname from the English and American soldiers as he called them all 'Johnny', and having two thumbs on one hand, they in return called him 'Johnny Two Thumbs'.

Chak started working for Johnny and his son as an apprentice in 1985, and was the first non-family member to be taught the art of tattooing. There were only four studios in Singapore then, three were owned by one family and the other by Henry Gold. "Tattooing was very secretive back then," Chak explains. "Johnny had a special case to cover his machine so people couldn't see how it worked." Which along with other old equipment is now displayed in the entrance to the shop. Chak set up the Johnny Two Thumbs tattoo studio in 1988 along with Jaws to keep the legend and name alive. "We didn't want the name to get lost in history, so we set up the studio so people would always associate Johnny Two Thumbs with great tattoos." Chak is happy to

share his stories and the truth about the legend with anyone interested enough to seek it out.

Lionel then takes us to another shopping mall a short cab ride away where the Henry Gold studio is situated. Henry passed away three years ago and handed the studio down to his sons. Sadly however, when we arrive, the shop is quite bare with just a couple of chairs in the empty room, and some very old tattoo machines and books in the window. "I hope they are just refurbishing," Lionel says sombrely. "This shop is a real part of our history – all the guys that worked here were real old timers. It will be sad if it is gone for good."

I only scratched the surface in my few days here, but I kind of understand what Lionel is saying about losing the old timers and the history they hold. Singapore is often described as 'diet Asia', but I had an amazing time exploring the city and learning a little about its rich history. I will most certainly be back in this old port before long. 🌸

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INTO THE DARKNESS

www.davidstoupakis.com

For centuries, adversity has lead to the creation of captivating works of art and, yes, even success. New York-based painter and tattoo collector, David Stoupakis, is the latest in a line of greats who's turning his hardships into gorgeous tableaux

Born in Brighton, Massachusetts, Stoupakis was faced with his first major challenge the moment he was born. As a premature baby, he had to overcome a number of complications early on in life, including a learning disability that would end up pushing him towards artistic expression.

It was during his first year of school that teachers realized Stoupakis' creativity held the potential to develop greatly, a fact that his parents

immediately embraced.

"I always just knew that making art in some way or another was what I was going to do with my life. It was the one thing I felt I was good at, and I was lucky enough to have the support of my family. I had a really shitty time in school. I grew up with a learning disability, so I had to go to all these special schools. It sucked, but when my parents saw my interest in art, they really got behind it. I will always be so grateful to my mom and dad for all the encouragement they gave me.

APRELLA

Stoupakis' muse and partner, Aprella, truly does do it all. Actress, model and all-around artist, Aprella has walked the runways at LA Fashion Week and during the Cannes Film Festival, has done Halloween performances for both Alice Cooper and Heidi Klum, and has been featured in films and music videos. Aprella is the definition of versatility, so is it any wonder she's the perfect artist's muse?



"My early influences came from Walt Disney movies, TV cartoons and the comic books I read," says Stoupakis of his beginnings. "Making art as a kid was always a great escape for me. I would like to say the first thing I ever drew was something cool like a skull, but it was more likely tracing my hand to make a turkey for Thanksgiving at school. Drawing skulls, devils and pentagrams came later down the road," he laughs.

Although the imagery of those early days didn't include anything exceptionally dark, it was still considered gloomy enough by many of Stoupakis' instructors to be a cause for concern. But even with all the parent-teacher meetings and discussions, none of it seemed to rub off with age and today Stoupakis creates paintings that often feature dark skies, mischievous creatures and blood.

"I understand and see why maybe some people would feel that way, but I have never seen the work I do as dark. I look at it more like I am painting my interpretation of what I see as the 🌑"



I HAVE NEVER SEEN THE WORK I DO
AS DARK. I LOOK AT IT MORE LIKE I
AM PAINTING MY INTERPRETATION
OF WHAT I SEE AS THE HUMAN
CONDITION IN THE LAND OF OZ

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE
CREATING SOMETHING FOR
YOURSELF. SOMETHING YOU
TRULY BELIEVE IN, AND THEN
FINDING OUT IT MOVES
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THAT THEY WANT TO OWN IT



human condition in the Land of Oz," he explains.

Enrolling in the Art Institute of Boston in 1992, it took Stoupakis a year to realize that art school wasn't for him. "I learned a hell of a lot in the time I was there, but I just really couldn't hang with the artsy fartsy kind of vibe that was going on there at the time." Which meant it was time to become a self-taught artist.

Selling his first painting in 1995, Stoupakis recalls, "it was the best feeling in the world and still is today. There is nothing like creating something for yourself, something you truly believe in, and then finding out it moves someone else enough that they want to own it."

Following a stint as an artist for a gaming company, Stoupakis chose to focus all of his time and talents on painting in 1999, which also happened to be the year he met his muse, Aprella.

"Aprella has had so much influence on my work, not only as my muse, but she has always been the voice



AS OF LATE, I WOULD SAY THE IDEAS FOR THE PAINTINGS ARE VERY PLANNED OUT AND EXECUTED BEFORE I PAINT THEM. I DO A LOT OF SKETCHES AND COLOR STUDIES

I go to to get an honest opinion on something I am working on at the time. Aprella has been here for the evolution of my work, so she got to see the good with the bad and has a very good understanding of what I am trying to say with my work, so she is great for me to bounce ideas off of."

Nowadays, Stoupakis calls New York

City home and as he puts it, it was an inevitable move. "As much as I love being from Boston and going back to visit, it's a very conservative city and there wasn't much room for the kind of work I was doing, so I always knew I would end up in NYC where there was more opportunity. This city keeps you on your toes."

THE GIRL WHO SAT FOR TOO LONG

"That painting was created for a show called In the Nursery. It's a painting about procrastination, not letting the world pass you by," says Stoupakis of his latest limited edition, hand-signed giclee print, which just so happens to be available in his online store now. With only 50 copies up for grabs, you better hurry if you want to snag one of these gorgeous pieces for yourself. You know you do!

His devotion to the craft, combined with his indisputable talent have resulted in ever-increasing praise and popularity, and as it turns out, success has forced Stoupakis to slightly alter his artistic process.

"As of late, I would say the ideas for the paintings are very planned out and executed before I paint them. I do a lot of sketches and color studies. The paintings I do take me quite a bit of time and I am always working with some kind of deadline these days, so I never really have the time to make lots of changes and have the paintings 🌸

grow in that kind of way.”

When it comes to art, Stoupakis also takes time to appreciate the work of others, including that of tattoo artists, being an avid collector of ink himself.

“I was 18 years old when I got my first tattoo and I couldn’t wait to get it. Back in 1992 it still wasn’t legal to get tattooed in Massachusetts, so my friends and I would all drive up to New Hampshire to get tattooed at this shop. I can’t remember the guy’s name, but I got this terrible dragon tattoo that looks like a salamander with wings,” he laughs. “But I still love it today.”

Since then, Stoupakis has gotten work from Joshua Glantz, Paul Booth and Vincent Castiglia. “Booth and Castiglia both have very unique styles; you know when you see a Booth or Castiglia tattoo. There is something very special about them – it’s true art.

“The biggest piece I have right now is a whole sleeve that was all laid out in one sitting so the piece would work together as one. The sleeve is [made up] of parts of paintings of mine that have different significances in my life. I am having my whole back tattooed as we speak. The back tattoo is of this big beautiful, creepy tree that is a tribute to my big brother, Alex.”

Asked what he thinks of those who still refuse to consider tattooing a true, legitimate art form – we all know those people, unfortunately, do still exist – Stoupakis thinks it’s rather simple.

“They need to open their eyes. I don’t see any line between it, it’s all art to me. If I didn’t have paper or canvas, I would find something else to put my creativity on. It’s about what comes through you, not whether it’s



I AM HAVING MY WHOLE BACK TATTOOED AS WE SPEAK. THE BACK TATTOO IS OF THIS BIG BEAUTIFUL, CREEPY TREE THAT IS A TRIBUTE TO MY BIG BROTHER, ALEX



on skin or hanging in some gallery.”

So would he ever consider becoming a tattoo artist? After all, there’s likely no shortage of tattoo lovers who would line up to have a piece of work as unique and captivating as those created by Stoupakis adorning their skin.

“Yeah, I definitely have thought about doing tattoos before, but I haven’t been at the point yet where I felt like I would be able to give the learning of it 100 percent, and I have always felt like if I can’t give it my all, then it would just be disrespectful to the art of it.”

Seems like Stoupakis won’t be trading in his brushes for a tattoo

machine in the near future, so art appreciators will just have to settle for enjoying his work on canvas. And when they do, they should set out to discover what David Stoupakis hopes is present in every one of his paintings: “Question, beauty, and hopefulness.”

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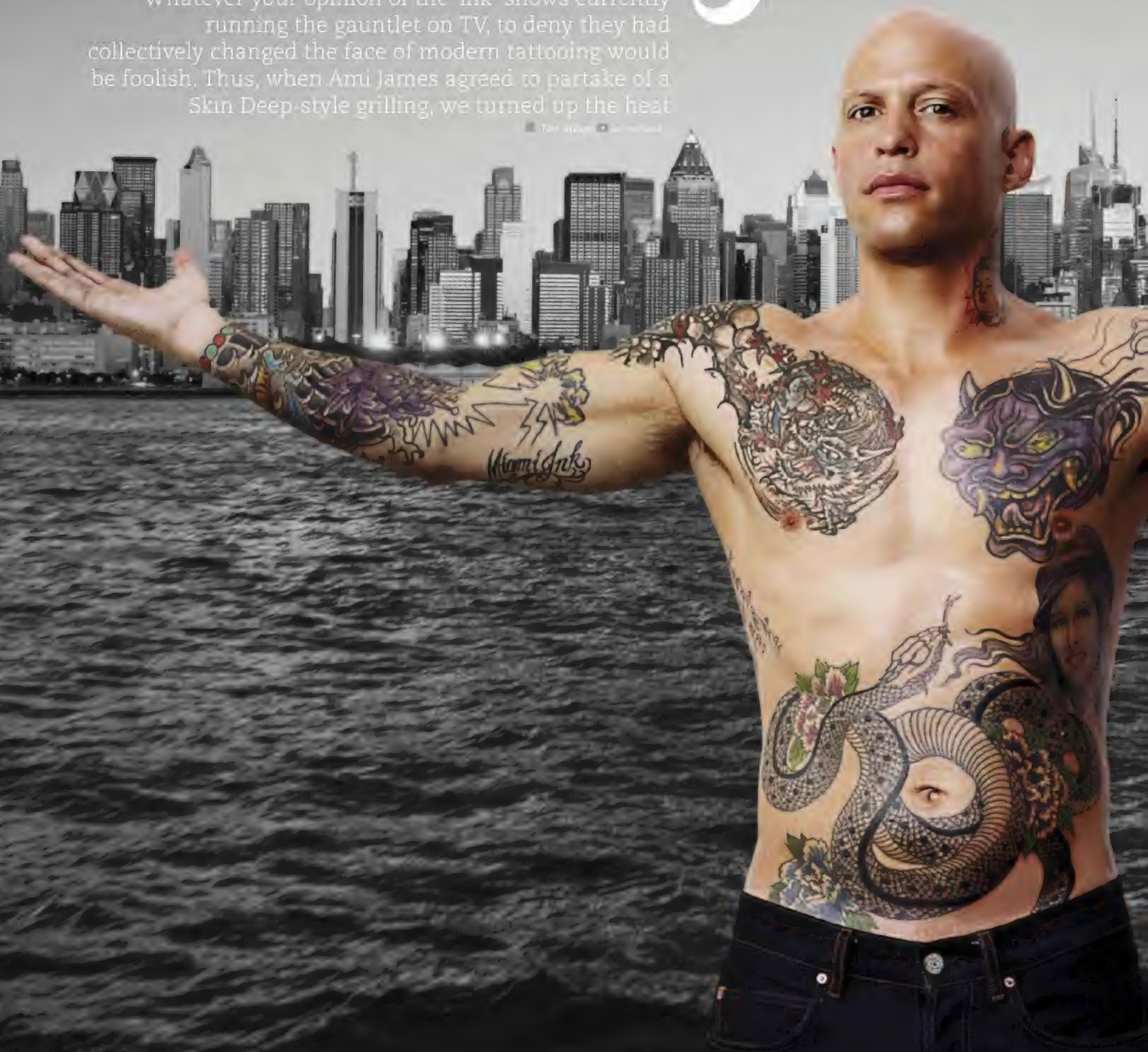
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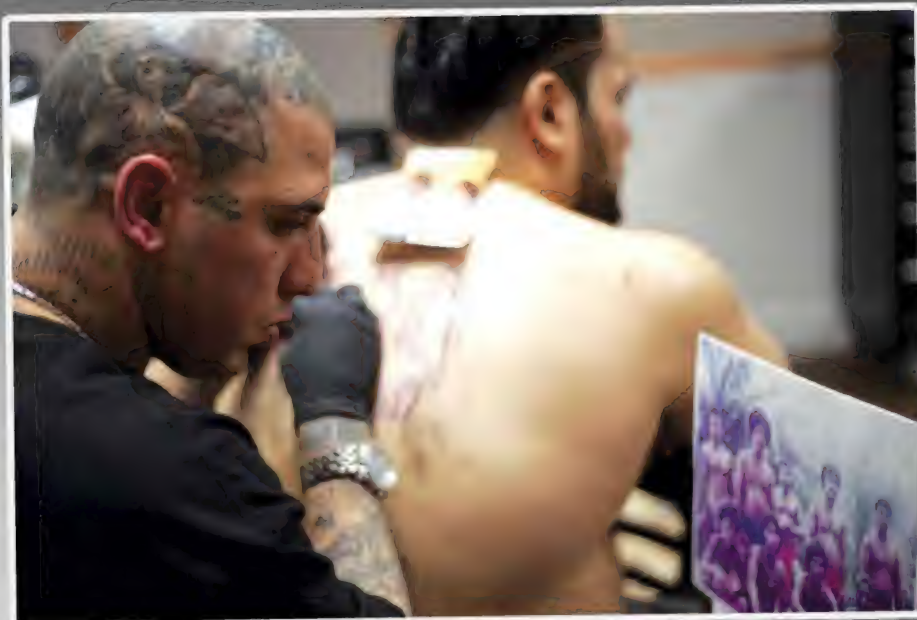


Absolute reality

Whatever your opinion of the 'ink' shows currently running the gauntlet on TV, to deny they had collectively changed the face of modern tattooing would be foolish. Thus, when Ami James agreed to partake of a Skin Deep-style grilling, we turned up the heat

■ Tim Arden ■ @timarden





At the southern-most point of Sinai is the city of Sharm-el-Sheikh where Ami James was born and raised. His father (who was in the American navy) met his mother (a native of Israel) and Ami spent his early years in an area of Israel which had been part of Egypt. He was six or seven when Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt that included the reuniting of Sinai with Egypt, and as a result, his family moved to the outskirts of Tel Aviv where they stayed until he was 12. At that stage, Ami's father had left, and he, his brother, and his mom, found themselves in difficult times. After a big stock market crash in Israel, his mother found herself out of work with all her savings gone.

Ami remembers fondly the visits he and his brother used to take to Virginia to stay with their grandparents (on their father's side). "We were blown away by America's size and food and everything. America was this huge land of opportunity." When they saw how much they were suffering in Israel, and how hopeless their situation had become, Ami and his brother "managed to convince mom that maybe moving to America might be the best opportunity [they'd] ever have". By then she felt there was nothing to lose, so decided they'd give it a chance. She sold the last of everything she had, the three of them hopped on a plane, and they flew to Virginia where they stayed with their grandparents. Ami's mom flew down to Miami to stay with a friend, and after a couple of months, landed a job. "She called us up and was like 'alright, are you guys ready to come to Miami?' and we said 'hell yeah!' So we left Virginia, went to Miami, and that's where it all started."

He lived in Miami until he was 17 and then went back to Israel to join the service. His dream was to join the navy in Israel because of his father. "The only thing he left me was the love of the ocean, and since I grew up in Sharm-el-Sheikh, that's the only thing you have. At one point I wanted to join an elite part of the Navy..." But because he was an American now, he was turned down and instead joined a top infantry unit, ending up being a sniper for three years. Afterwards he returned to America to find himself 🌻

THEN I
APPRENTICED.
I DID MY TIME.
IT WAS LIKE
GOING BACK
TO THE ARMY
AND DOING
BOOT CAMP
ALL OVER

without a job and without a high school diploma. He was 20 years old.

Ever since he could remember, he always had the skill to draw. Both his father and his grandfather were painters, and it was a gift passed down from them. So even though he hadn't been in school since he was 15, he had always stuck with actively studying and pursuing his art. The first time he got tattooed he was 17 years old. He was still in Israel and it was his first glimpse at a tattoo machine. "While I was in the service, I had a weekend off and I went and got tattooed. When I was getting tattooed, the guy that was tattooing me walked outside for some reason and I grabbed the machine and started tattooing myself. That was my first glimpse of the tattoo world." That was when the idea of pursuing tattooing first entered Ami's mind; when the tattooer returned to find Ami with the machine in his hand, "he actually let me finish off the tattoo. And I knew then that it would become my life."

Ami had been back in the States for about six months when on his birthday his two roommates presented him with tattoo equipment. "They said, 'here's your present and from here on, you're going to start tattooing.'" After another six months or so Ami landed an apprenticeship with Lou of Tattoos by Lou. At that stage, Tattoos by Lou was one of the most predominant shops on the East Coast. Lou himself was a very old-school Americana-style tattoo artist, with a rich history and lots of cool stories that he shared with his new apprentice. Ami was very drawn to him, but it took a lot of begging and pleading until Lou said yes. "Then I apprenticed. I did my time. It was like going back to the army and doing boot camp all over." When the apprenticeship came to an end, he

found that he was now a tattoo artist and left the US.

For five or six years, Ami travelled the world. He would fill guest-spots in tattoo shops in any country that he could. He would stay in each place for a few months until he made enough money to move onto somewhere else and do it all over again. He explains that one of the biggest gifts that you have as a tattoo artist is the connections that you make and the ability to live out of a suitcase. "It was awesome. You didn't live by the visas,



the IRS, or worry about how you pay your taxes, how you do this or how you do that, you're just a travelling artist. You work for commission and you get to travel anywhere you want. The person that owns the shop pays the taxes and you're not a part of it, you're just there for a couple of months before moving on. It's something that was the easiest thing in the world for me because you're basically just living to travel, you're living to tattoo. You put your mark on the world as much as you can and just enjoy the ability, the freedom, of just being able to say, well, tomorrow I'm done here. I wanna go to Portugal, Milan, Denmark, Sweden, wherever."

Eventually Ami found himself

back in New York which is when the pattern started developing of travelling back and forth between there and Miami. He would spend his summers in New York and his winters in Miami. Occasionally he'd go back to travelling the world, but he'd always return to one of the two cities that had now become his bases. He was now also working the nightlife scene and was partners in a bar. His tattooing had become a hobby, and he was only tattooed friends or took the occasional appointment. He has always enjoyed the nightlife scene and has discovered recently that people were always surprised about that fact. But his friends would always point out that ever since he was 21, he was always either promoting, or doing something involved with that scene. "That was always my love. I loved going around shaking hands, making people laugh, showing people a good time."

Charlie Corwin, the owner of Original Media, was looking for a tattoo artist with charisma, the kind of charisma that would work on TV. He had heard through a mutual friend that Ami James would be the perfect candidate so a meeting was arranged. "But this was 2004. Reality TV hadn't really been exploited to the full yet. Don't get me wrong, there were a few reality shows, but you're talking minimal numbers; it was before the craze. So my first thought was a complete turn-off. I would do a documentary before I did a TV show. But the idea of building a business and showing the world that tattoo artists are not these idiots the world seemed to think they were was appealing. I mean, back in the day if you had tattoos you were associated with being a criminal. I remember being denied entry when trying to cross borders." Being heavily tattooed for 25 years, Ami has experienced countless strip-searches, and has been frowned upon everywhere he went.

"So I looked at this opportunity and I thought, this is the first time when we might be able to explain to the public that just because you're tattooed, it does not make you any different from anybody else."

They discussed how they could go about explaining to people that tattoo artists are just artists. How the good ones are basically just artists who have managed to take their talents

YOU GO ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD AND IT'S AMAZING HOW LOCKED IN YOU BECOME JUST BY KNOWING THE PERSON THAT'S BEEN TATTOOING THERE FOR ALL THOSE YEARS. BECAUSE HE HAS BASICALLY MET EVERYONE IN THAT PLACE



I LOOKED AT THIS OPPORTUNITY AND I THOUGHT, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WHEN WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN TO THE PUBLIC THAT JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE TATTOOED, IT DOES NOT MAKE YOU ANY DIFFERENT FROM ANYBODY ELSE

and make money with them, rather than to just paint and "be a starving artist because that world didn't belong to the street anymore. The art world ceased to belong to the street a long time before that, but the cleanest form of art is street expression, and that's what tattoos meant to us". Ami agreed to do a pilot episode, but wasn't convinced that opening a shop in New York City would be a good idea at that point. Rent in New York compared to any other place is extortionate and it was still not clear if the show would

be a success, so Ami suggested instead that they go down to Miami and do it from there. "I said let's just open a shop there because it'll be cheap, the overheads will be cheap, and I won't get stuck with \$25,000 a month rent in case this whole thing doesn't work. Because to be honest, at that point I didn't even want to own a tattoo shop, I was happy just tattooing out of my friend's shop. But I figured I'd give it a go because anything could happen." Love Hate Tattoo in Miami was owned by a friend of Ami's called Merlin; at



the time, Merlin wanted to sell the shop, so Ami bought it from him.

Charlie and Ami sat down and began to discuss how the show should work, to figure out what is so interesting about tattoos and how they could get it across to a wide audience. Ami was convinced that one 🍌



OVER 100 EPISODES LATER AND I'M STILL LIKE HOW COULD THIS BE? BUT I REALISE THAT THE STORIES WILL NEVER END. SHOCKING MOMENTS WILL NEVER CEASE

thing most people could relate to, are the stories behind some of the tattoos. "A lot of the stories are crazy if you listen, and as a tattoo artist you're hearing them through your whole career. We knew that was going to capture and captivate the audience, the fact that they could relate all of a sudden to a story that connected them to tattoos.

"The audience would also come to understand that what we do at times is a kind of a healing process for some, kind of a funny process for others, and for us as tattoo artists, it's just what we do." He went on to explain to me that most of his friends who have tattoos get them simply because they love tattoos, they love the way they look, and they don't care whether there's a story behind them or not. But for Ami, they couldn't build a show only that, but needed the stories. "Over 100 episodes later and I'm still like 'how could this be?' But I realise that the stories will never end,

WE, AS HUMANS, DON'T HAVE AN EXPIRATION DATE THAT SAYS 70 YEARS OR WHATEVER. WE LIVE A GOOD LONG LIFE THESE DAYS, AND SO SHOULD YOUR TATTOOS. SO TO ME, THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS HOW DO I MAKE YOUR TATTOO LAST YOUR WHOLE LIFE, AND STILL TRY TO KEEP IT AS BEAUTIFUL AS IT WAS FROM THE FIRST DAY, RIGHT UP UNTIL THE LAST?

shocking moments will never cease."

For Ami, Miami Ink became a big turning point for the tattoo industry and the way that tattoos have come to be perceived. It was inevitable that the tattoo world was reaching a point where it was going to become a thing that TV would try and cash in on. "They were already pursuing it. It wasn't like I invented it and shoved it out there. Also, one thing we were pretty adamant about was that we were never going to teach people how to tattoo on the show, we just wanted to show them what we do and what we deal with."

It met with a lot of resentment from some quarters, but at the same time it was bringing more money into the tattoo shops. "We actually got the people that would never have stepped into a tattoo shop, to go in and get tattooed at the local shop that had been there for years, when they would never in their lives have given it a chance before. Not until they saw the show. I mean, we had that happen in huge numbers.

"Statistically, the numbers of tattooed people grew immensely. I mean, in huge, huge numbers. Artists, basketball players, hip hop artists, singers, everybody started getting tattooed. There's not one athlete out there these days that isn't covered in tattoos. I mean, it's everywhere. I think the people who really always had the good skills, the show only drove more business to them, and the people that didn't have the skills were really the haters. If you're really good and you've got a great clientele, there's no reason why you should hate your neighbour, because you're doing good business.

"And we also realised that we were doing it justice. We're doing TV, but we're not bashing the name of the tattoo world. We're keeping it as real as it possibly gets, and nowadays you have to make TV. That's what we do. We find a balance to be able to give both, to be able to prosper off the business and support our families and do everything that we do. But you ask me at the end of the day what I am, and I'll tell you that I'm a tattoo artist. It's my life."

A little over a year ago, Ami opened a studio right in the heart of New York, Wooster Street Social Club, which also

happens to be set for NY Ink. Despite the price of rent being quadruple what it is in Miami, Ami still charges the same minimum for both shops, believing that it helps people who don't have as much money to go in and get tattooed. The two shops also share a lot of the same clientele, so he feels it would be unfair to charge them at different rates depending on what shop they stepped into.

Things have changed since the days before Ami started doing TV, "now you're in the eye of the public and everyone's looking at you. They want things from you, they want to get a piece of you, they want to take a piece of you; that's something that you learn how to deal with as it goes. It's not something that I figured out the next day. I think it was a good thing that I did it at 33 and not at 21, because I can definitely understand why it turns people into monsters. You start thinking that you're a celebrity and all this bullshit. And I'm not a fucking celebrity. I'm a tattoo artist, just like the same tattoo artists that are still in my circle that have never been on the show. They're still with me at the end of the day. That's who comes to my house. I didn't start hanging out with the Kim Kardashians or the fucking Paris Hiltons. It's not my world, and nor do I give a shit about that world. I'm a reality star... I mean what the hell is that?!" he laughs and continues, "I didn't climb on anybody's back to get here. I didn't have to do a sex-tape to get to where I'm at. I didn't have to make a fool out of myself like Jersey Shore, I just did what I do and what so many tattoo artists do."

The bonus of doing television for Ami is the fact that there are certain perks. He gets to make a decent living and he also gets good media coverage for his shop. He also gets to help out his friends, to give them jobs that make good money for them. "It's a great feeling to be able to watch them prosper, to give them the opportunities to join me in many different ventures." And most importantly for Ami, he gets to look after his family properly, "but for all those perks, there's a downfall. You can't sit at a restaurant and eat with your family without being stalked in some way, or bothered; people wanna take pictures of you"





YOU REALISE THAT PEOPLE GROW ON TV, THE STYLE CHANGES, DEMAND CHANGES; WHAT WAS A HIT LAST YEAR MIGHT NOT BE THE HIT THIS YEAR, AND I LIVE BY THAT. I TRY TO GIVE MY BEST AND KEEP UP-TO-DATE AND JUST GIVE GOOD TV

kid; everybody wants something for no reason, or they want to give you something."

He uses an interesting analogy for what it's like to be in the limelight: "It's a roller coaster ride, and it's funny because the roller coaster will ride you until you're done if you don't know how to ride it. I've managed to keep a level head, managed to stay humble and not let this shit get to me. I live my own life. I'm like a fucking hermit y'know. I come home, I spend time with my family, and I hang out with the same friends I've hung out with for over 25 years now, and that's where I'm happy. I don't need the bullshit limelight and all the shit that goes around it. It's not for me."

Ami finds it important to take one day at a time in the world he is now in. One week's rating can reflect on the following weeks rating, and suddenly everything has a new angle to it. For him, it's as precarious as the fact that you could have a great season, but if the last episode lets you down, you

could suddenly find yourself with a cancelled show. So his focus is to not look too far ahead because there are no guarantees. His aim is to make the best of each day and to try and get as much into the few months that you know you're going to be on TV. "Because all the shit is short-lived. I'm aware of that. I'm not going to sit here and bullshit you with 'oh I'm a fucking star, I'm gonna be here forever' because that's ridiculous. You realise that people grow on TV, the style changes, demand changes; what was a hit last year might not be the hit this year, and I live by that. I try to give my best and keep up-to-date and just give good TV. From that I get to do business and get the best tattoos I can in there. And also get the drama that people want to see on TV these days for some strange reason. But it is what it is. And it's work. The machine is huge now and there is a lot to do."

I've always been curious to know how those involved with reality TV view the actual 'reality' of it. I explain to

Ami that I can't help but feel that once people know a camera is on them, they're going to act differently. Ami makes an interesting point though: "reality for me is with a camera behind my head. Reality for you is so far away from it. I don't know anything without the camera in the tattoo shop, I'm so used to it already that to me, that's reality."

The only challenge, Ami admits, is getting the customer to feel the same. For them it's not reality and can often take time for them to become accustomed to it. So for Ami that's the bigger battle: "If they've just hiccuped, or messed something up, unless you want to look like an idiot on TV, we're going to have to shoot it again. And



most people are happy to do that, so it is pretty much reality, but why would we show you all the cuts where this guy loses his microphone or says the f-word by accident. So at one point you realise that we're trying to give you as close to reality as possible, but remember, we're still shooting this and there are the difficulties of the process. For me it's reality, it's as close to reality as I know at this point."

These days, Ami has started working with a lot of tattoo artists who work in black and grey, most notably Tim Hendricks and Tommy Montoya who currently work at Wooster Street Social Club. He finds that because he is working in such close quarters with them, their style is starting to have an influence on his. "I'm starting to look at tattoos now more as art on its own, rather than just as a tattoo. When you do Americana-style tattooing, you want to get that black, heavy, whip shading, bold colours. Green, yellow, red. And that's it. That's very 'tattoo'. But then the more you try and dabble in it, the more you're working with other styles, you find that you're starting to look at things that at one point weren't considered real tattoos. So these days I'm thinking about how it looks as a piece of art as well as how it will look as a tattoo."

"I think it's evolution. The skill level, and our tools, have gotten better. The needles we've gotten and

question is, what is it going to look like in 15 years. "We, as humans, don't have an expiration date that says 70 years or whatever, we live a good long life these days, and so should your tattoos. So to me, the most important thing is how do I make your tattoo last your whole life, and still try to keep it as beautiful as it was the first day, right up until the last?"

As we approach the end of our interview I ask Ami about the old and the new, the old-school and the new-school, how things have changed. "I look at the guys that laid down the ground rules. Ed Hardy, Filip Leu, Mike Malone, Sailor Jerry, Cliff Raven, Bob Roberts... there's so many of them. So many good guys that really were doing what we do now but 25 or more years ago. They pushed the envelope. If they could only see what kids are doing now, they would have said that that was the same thing for them decades before now. People were saying to them back in the day, 'How the fuck are you guys doing that?!' I mean, God knows what they're going to be doing 15 years from now. I don't know how much better it can get anymore. Because, literally, you've got these guys doing super copies of anything you want. So how good can it get already?! But I'm sure Ed Hardy asked around 30 years ago, 'how good can it get?' For me, he was my hero, and I would have said that it couldn't get any better than that too. I

look at them still and I'm like wow – how was he even able to do it back then?!

"The tools, the needles we had back then, it wasn't the same. Now people don't even know how to make needles. They buy everything disposable, they don't know anything about machines. You can just order a machine on the internet. I can remember when we had to learn how to build a machine before we even owned a machine. You couldn't buy needles, you had to make them! You don't have disposable tubes, you had to scrub your tubes every day. I'm sure the old-timers are looking at us like we're completely out of our minds, but that's evolution, and I try and evolve every day. I keep evolving my style. I mean, I could keep doing Japanese and stay safe, but I'll try a portrait, I'll try this or that."

"I'd rather be a jack-of-all-trades and be able to say that I can do a good tattoo no matter what style it is. That's really what I want to do. I want to become that guy that's an all-round artist that will always give you a good clean tattoo." 🐾

REALITY FOR ME IS WITH A CAMERA BEHIND MY HEAD. REALITY FOR YOU IS SO FAR AWAY FROM IT

the way we've learnt to use them... I mean, you're seeing guys do photo-realism down to the T on people. If you would have said 25 years ago, 'Is that possible?', we would have said 'Never, never, never'. You can't stop this evolution, so you try and evolve with it." Ami has started to look for inspiration in things that may not have been inspiration for tattoo artists, medieval designs that you're more likely to see in an antique shop, etc. "I realise that I will no longer look at a tattoo having to be that eagle, or that dagger, or that snake. From now on it's going to be whatever I want it to be." It is important however that a tattoo lasts for as long as possible, he adds. Because any tattoo can look good for the first year, but the





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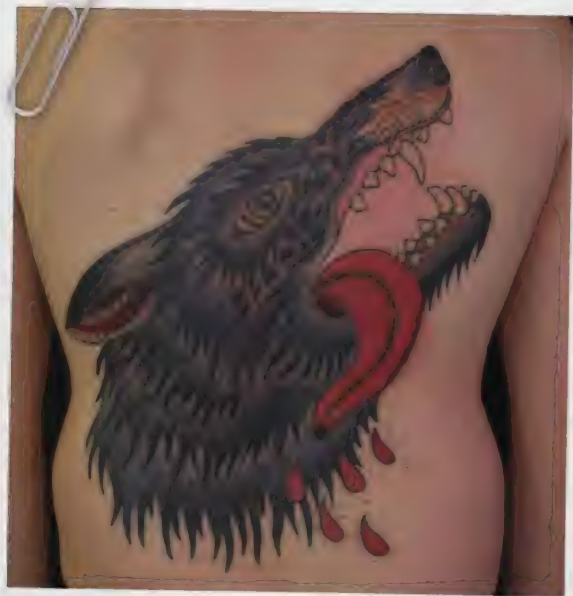
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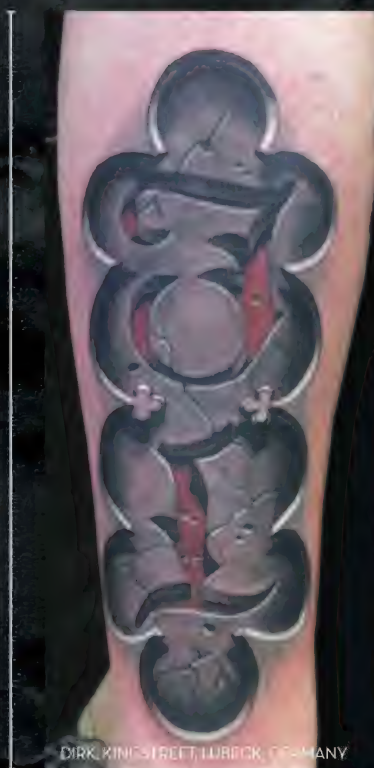




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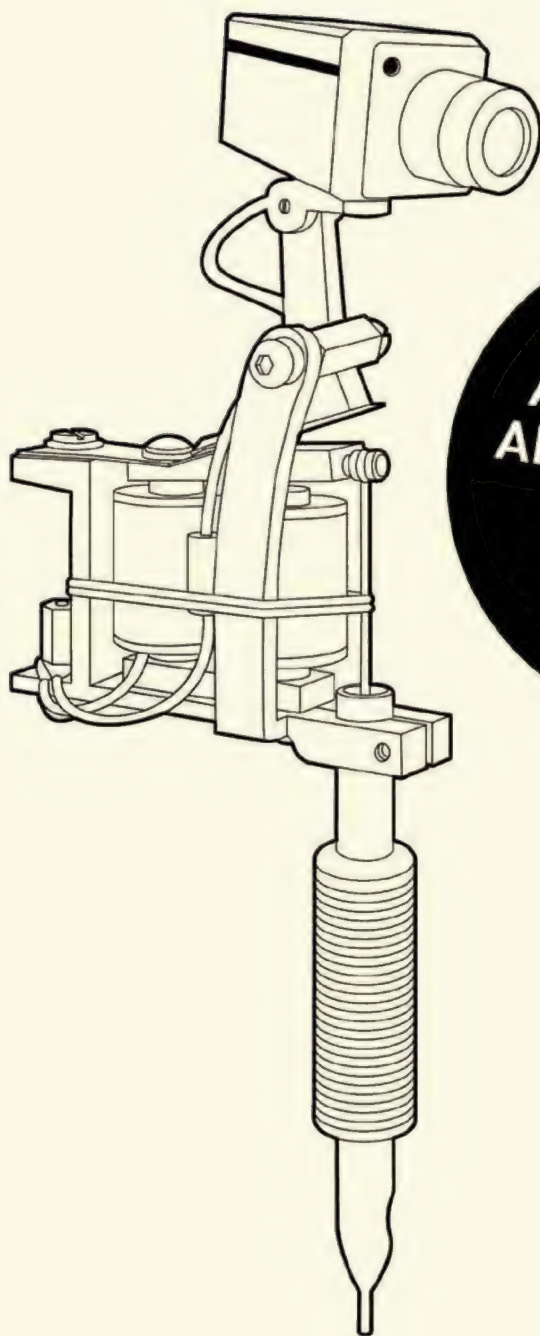
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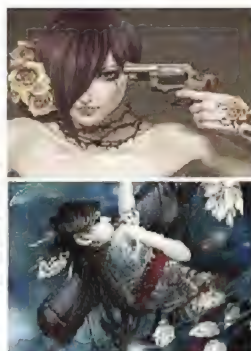
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TALES OF GODS & MONSTERS

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"In hindsight, I'd say my dad may have been responsible," says Columbus Ohio-based tattoo artist, Gunnar, when asked about the origins of his affinity for art. "When I was a kid, he did a drawing of a wizard for me on a wall in my bedroom; I remember making him cut out the wall and take it with us when we moved. He also took me too the Dalí Museum and the Smithsonian when I was young. I didn't pursue art till much later, but that may have been where my interest began. I doodled as a kid, but I never took it too seriously. I was too into skateboarding at the time."

Even so, Gunnar went on to opt for an art minor in college, but is quick to admit he didn't rely too heavily on formal training for the bulk of his skills. "Most of what I have learned is from tonnes of practice and trial and error. I read a lot and I practice more. Plus, I have also been fortunate

enough to have some amazing artists as friends, that helped a lot."

What he did get during his time in school, believe it or not, was the opportunity to become a tattoo apprentice. "Tattooing wasn't something I initially pursued. I was lucky because it found me," he says. "I began really becoming fascinated with tattooing and art during my apprenticeship."

"I served two different apprenticeships before I began to tattoo. The style in which they taught and tattooed was completely different, which I am glad I experienced. Tattooing and art are very personal, and although there are specific techniques that are essential to both, there is a lot more to be gained by having an open mind. When I first started tattooing I wasn't doing much art, I drew flash, but that was it. I didn't start painting till five years later"





Gunnar began taking on his first clients while still in college, but then graduation came about and brought with it a short-lived bout of, what some might call, responsible thinking.

"I decided to try a few jobs that required my diploma. I realized that I loved to tattoo too much and a suit

BOTH THE PEOPLE I APPRENTICED FOR HAD THEIR DOUBTS. THEY THOUGHT I SUCKED, BUT I THINK THAT LIT THE FIRE FOR ME TO IMPROVE

PROMOTING HOPE THROUGH INK

Last September, Gunnar wrote on his blog that he made "a conscious decision to no longer promote negativity in the art I create" and he plans to stick to his word. "I've had some clients in the past that wanted work that was ultra depressing, almost like a visual suicide note, and it bummed me out. I don't mind monsters and graveyards, but I'd rather promote hope over despair.

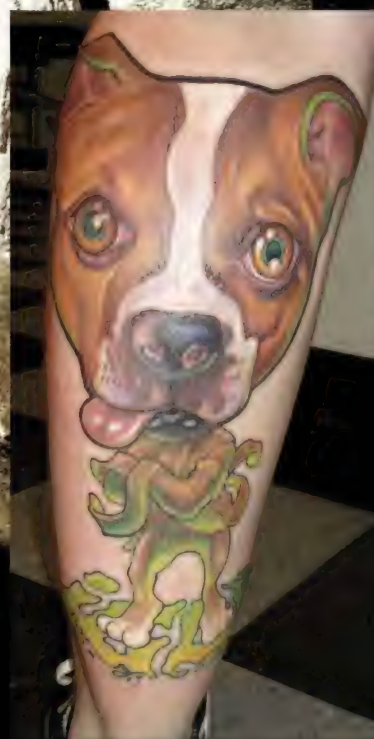
and cubicle wasn't my path in life, so I pursued a career in tattooing."

And he did so even though his first work on anyone other than himself – Gunnar's initial experience putting needle to skin marked his body with a small black spade – was a cause for speculation.

"I was ten times more nervous when I did my second tattoo – a barbed wire band on a friend of mine. It was not very good. Both the people I apprenticed for had their doubts that I would make it in this industry. They thought I sucked, but I think that lit the fire for me to improve. I wanted to prove them wrong."

Honing his personal style throughout the years, as his creativity became increasingly emboldened, Gunnar ended up in a place that has often been described as the perfect balance of cute and creepy.

"I never set out to create work considered 'cute and creepy', it was how people described my art, so I just decided to use the label that was already being provided. I never draw with an intention to fit a particular mold. I draw in whatever style helps the image best suit the idea and meaning. I try and stay diverse if need be. The cute and creepy work is really done for the fans of that style. It is what people like to see from me 🍂



and it comes naturally.

"When I first started, my early work was color pin-ups, cherubs and neo-traditional. My 'style' began to show itself around the time I started painting. My good friends at the time were guys like Eric Merrill, Jime Litwalk, Cleen Rock One and Hoffa; they had such distinct style and I really admired that, so I found something I really liked and pushed it. I was heavily influenced at the time by artists outside tattooing, like Joe Sorren, Todd Schorr, Mark Ryden, Bernie Wrightson and Jack Davis, so it really was a hybrid of tattoo art and various painting styles. That and having two baby daughters and watching a lot of Disney! Plus, I am a horror movie buff, so the creepiness made its way into my work."

Just don't expect to see any of that creepiness in his two personal favorite tattoos. "My daughters tattooed me a few years back. They chose what I was getting, drew the images and made stencils – I have a kitten and a unicorn."

GODS AND MONSTERS: TATTOO SHOP HOPPING

Although a native of New Britain, Connecticut, when it came time to open up his own shop, Gods and Monsters Tattoo Studio and Art Gallery, Gunnar opted for Columbus, Ohio. Then he embraced the warmer climates of California. Then he headed back to Columbus. Confused? No need to be, here's how it happened.

"It was an amazing time of growth for me, but the artist I started Gods and Monsters with moved and after that it wasn't the same, so I closed doors when the lease came up. I wanted to move on and grow as an artist. My friends Adam 'Honkey Kong' Hathorn and Greg 'Craola' Simkins lived out that way and I wanted to work around them. And California is Mecca for everything I loved about art, so I moved. Unfortunately, I had too much stuff in my personal life that I was dealing with to really get the most out of the experience.

"I moved back to Columbus to be by my kids. Gio, owner of High Street



I NEVER SET OUT TO CREATE WORK
CONSIDERED 'CUTE AND CREEPY', IT WAS
HOW PEOPLE DESCRIBED MY ART





I ALWAYS SAY, I TATTOO FOR OTHERS BUT I PAINT FOR ME. IT'S HOW I BALANCE MY LIFE

TATTOO SHOWDOWN: OHIO VS. CALIFORNIA

"California is vastly different from Ohio in regards to tattooing. The amount of talent out there is staggering. That's not to say Ohio doesn't have talent, it has had and still has some really talented folks, but California's collectors help make tattooing something exciting. They follow tattooing and they know what separates artists. In Ohio, there is still a huge lag in people's understanding of quality work."



Tattoo, has a great shop with a great group of guys and it has been a good fit. I didn't want the responsibility of owning a shop initially, I just wanted to rebuild and focus on my own career. For a long time, I didn't want to open or run a shop again, but I have thought about re-opening Gods and Monsters. I would love to create an artistic powerhouse and work around artists that are trying to push the levels of tattooing and art. That's what was great about Gods and Monsters, it was where I developed my style; I'd love to offer artists that same experience."

SIDE NOTES:

PAINTING & CHILDREN'S BOOKS

With so many years of tattooing behind him, it seems only logical that a moment to breathe and step back would be needed every so often, 🍌



and for Gunnar, such moments of separation have been key to his continued growth and success.

"I've walked away at times to clear the mind or be sucked up by the dramas of life. I work non-stop on my craft, so sometimes I get drained and have minor burnout, but tattooing is my passion and love, so I always come back. [But] to be honest, the breaks are very important because I tend to come back really refreshed and some of the information I have taken in finally has time to settle and be comprehended so that I can apply new techniques and strategies. I think those breaks help my work from becoming stagnant or ultra repetitive."

A need for change and new outlooks are also, at least in part, why Gunnar is never away from more traditional forms of art, like painting, for too long. Not to mention it just makes sense from a business standpoint.

"I always say, I tattoo for others but

I paint for me. It's how I balance my life. All I want to do is create, so the medium isn't what matters, it is the expression of ideas. Art outside of tattooing is important because it allows you to test ideas without practicing on skin. That and the fact that there are only so many tattoos you can do, so for me it is nice that I have a side income outside of tattooing alone. Tattoo artists need a backup. If I can't tattoo, I need to make sure I can make a living."

On top of all that, Gunnar is also currently working on a children's book. Yup, you read that correctly.

"I wrote a story a few years back called Lilith and Thatch. It's a dark little story about friendship and greed. I have been waiting to illustrate it because I want the art to really be amazing, so I wanted to hone my skills before I tackled that part. We should hopefully see it completed in the next year or two. It's my baby, so I'm taking my time."

STORY TO TELL

"Story to Tell was an idea I had a year or so ago to begin this large-scale collaboration project while travelling. It's turned out to be a very difficult project to pursue because my schedule is so hectic and it proved difficult to get others to follow through on it once I left town. The project may have just been too large - live and learn."

CH-CH-CH-CHANGES: ALTERING THE INDUSTRY

It seems today's tattoo industry is just as often defined by its talented artists as by the drama between them that mainstream media chooses to exploit. So the question is, given the chance, what changes would Gunnar make to tattooing's current state?

"This is one of those dangerous questions, I may piss people off, but it is what it is. I'm pretty over ego cliques, I haven't been in high school for years, I'm an adult, so the cool guy cliques are lame. I'll hang out with anyone, although I tend to be drawn to people that like to push the limits of their art, but being dismissed solely on style or status is ridiculous.

"I'd also like to see us as artists take control of how our industry is viewed. To have casting directors and TV producers that know nothing about tattooing define us. Well, it's nothing less than appalling."

There's also something to be said for tattooers who complain about having to deal with difficult clients.

"It's part of the gig," notes Gunnar. "If you don't like people, then this is the wrong artistic medium. It would be like hating to talk on the phone and then getting a job at a call centre. Tattoo artists really can be cry babies. We find stuff to bitch about all the time. When we're busy, we complain. When it's slow, we complain. Maybe we just need to come to realize this job is pretty amazing and without those 'pesky' people, we wouldn't get to do it." 🐼



I WORK NON STOP ON
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THE SMOKING GUN



You know you have a cult following when you have a section on your website specifically for fans to upload images of their interpretations of your work. Fetish artist, Brian M. Viveros, is one such painter

Just check out Under Your Skin and The Arm-Me and you'll see what I mean. Under Your Skin features tattoos of Viveros' work, whilst The Arm-Me, features fans dressing up as subjects of his paintings. And all of them are cool. Very, very cool.

But then, it is hard to go wrong with Viveros' work. His paintings are very simple yet, at the same time, they are

Stanton and many others. My earlier paintings were much darker and more surreal, they were much more erotic. I was young and still exploring different tunnels in my head. As time passes you learn more, you grow up and find out what really makes your Art – YOU. I had no formal training, just the drive. The drive to keep creating. I think I was possessed as a little kid. The power of art compels me!"

SINCE I WAS A BABY, ART HAS BEEN RUNNING THROUGH THESE VEINS. MY MAMMA SAID I POPPED OUT WITH A #2 PENCIL IN MY HAND!

dripping with detail and vibrancy. As it says on the bio on his website, 'His paintings are a drunken mix of oil, airbrush, acrylic, and ink. In his work Viveros shines a light on his own inner world and society at large and aims to captivate even the most jaded eyes.'

It was Viveros' participation in 'The Art of Porn' exhibition, held in Switzerland in 1997, that really shot him into the spotlight. "My art definitely has developed more throughout the years and has been a process of trial and error and growth. I started out doing underground hardcore comics before I moved onto the fine art thing. It wasn't until my first exhibition in 1997, at the Museum of Porn in Art, that I realized this is what I must do. I was so jazzed to be exhibiting alongside many great artists that I looked up to – H.R. Giger, Eric

Anyone who is creative fully understands the drive that compels you to 'get it out'. It is as if you will explode if you don't express yourself in some form of creative medium. And, of course, being slightly off kilter doesn't harm the process much either. In Viveros' case, it just pushes it onto the next level.

"Since I was a baby, art has been running through these veins. My Mamma said I popped out with a #2 pencil in my hand! Growing up as a kid was fun; I was into collecting comics and old classic monster movies. Life was pretty simple and everything was new. I think I've always been a little crazy which is a good thing; viewing the world a little different and upside down. I mean c'mon now, who wants to be normal. I was always thinking what I could do to just keep creating. 🍌"





I was never really bored as a kid. I used to make a lot of splatter films with my friends, the camera was something I was drawn to at an early age, and the idea of capturing moments in time, letting things unfold on film, was very exciting to me. I also was making my own underground comics at an early age which helped me out a lot with my drawing skills. It taught me how to plot scenes and tell a story... ah the good old days."

Viveros' evolution has come a long way from those early days. The hardcore comics have been replaced by iconic images that are instantly recognisable as his. And though Viveros claims that his later work is "less erotic" than his earlier stuff, his work still exudes pure sex. It seems, it is the simplicity in them that make them even more powerful.

"The approach is simple – create a smoking girl with minimal strong iconic elements. The old 'less is more'

GROWING UP AS A KID WAS FUN; I WAS INTO COLLECTING COMICS AND OLD CLASSIC MONSTER MOVIES. LIFE WAS PRETTY SIMPLE AND EVERYTHING WAS NEW



approach, focusing on a powerful pose to capture the viewer, bringing them closer into her world. My paintings usually take about two weeks. I'll start with a sketch or doodle, or sometimes I'll even write down the title of the painting, which helps me to work out different ideas. After the drawing is very tight, I then transfer it on to maple board and start laying in the oils. A lot of time is spent on the eyes and flesh tones, these things are very important to me in capturing that moment, that stare, bringing you

into the world of Dirtyland. The last element I always paint is the cigarette. Once I finish the smoke, then I have a smoke or drink. It's my little reward to myself."

It is Viveros' simple but powerful imagery that seems to have captured the imagination of tattoo artists and collectors around the world. It is almost as if he is adhering to one of the oldest tattoo rules – 'bold will hold' which in turn resonates with tattooists.

"I think it looks amazing!"





I've seen some really fucking awesome tattoos of my paintings that just blew me the fuck away. Did I just say fucking and fuck in one sentence? What the fuck! It's so cool to see how so many different tattoo artists have interpreted my work onto flesh. Different styles,

techniques; it's all inspiring and I feel like everyone with a Viveros piece is part of the DirtyLand Arm-Me-of-ME."

And has Viveros ever thought about picking up a machine and learning the craft himself?

"In the past I was very tempted,

THE LAST ELEMENT I ALWAYS PAINT IS THE CIGARETTE. ONCE I FINISH THE SMOKE THEN I HAVE A SMOKE OR DRINK. IT'S MY LITTLE REWARD TO MYSELF



especially as I was unsure of where I was going with my art. This was way back in the day. A lot of my friends were telling me I should give it a try, but somehow my life just ended up going in a different direction. I became more focused on teaching myself to paint and started exploring the realm of art galleries and exhibitions. The thought of it now would be so much fun, but I just don't have any time. Between preparing for solo exhibitions, making surreal films and business, my days are pretty tight."

And he is not joking! If you are a fan of the man, I would suggest signing up to his website because there is a lot more happening in Viveros world than just paintings. As he says himself, "More shows, more films, more drinks, more smoke. Just keep on truckin!"

"Life so far for me has been a crazy beautiful poetic bull fight, if that makes any sense. I guess I could say it's been a bit of a dance with the world; violent and beautiful at the same time. Letting things unfold and not being afraid of the animal. Taking chances, getting my hands bloody but in the end, still standing. Enjoy life and take time to be happy and thankful for all the dirty things I have. Stay dirty my friends." 🐮

THE DOT MATRIX



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 Northside Tattooz
 The Basement
 Bewick Street
 NE1 5EF

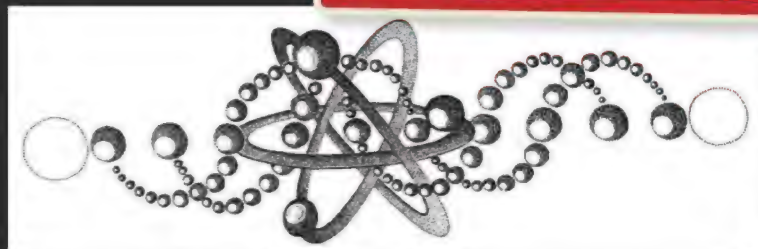
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I swear I only asked one question. One simple question and Ferank was away like a high-speed train carrying royalty. Maybe he is. Thus, in the spirit of the way the interview turned out, I find it best to simply hand over the pen and let the master get on with it

It all starts with just one dot. This is true for so many things. The humblest and most understated of beginnings. Then, the more dots that I add, the more it becomes...

The thing that I love about dotwork tattoos is on closer inspection, the time and effort invested, is reflected in the detail. I can see each individual mark that the needle has made. The dots resonate and 'speak' to me more than a flat solid section of tattooed skin. The textures and the softness that can be achieved strike a chord with my artistic brain.

I believe that creating dotwork tattoos is a discipline. To make beautiful art on skin, one dot at a time, is repetitive and difficult. You will need dedication in order to achieve good results. Because I work always in dots, I tend to do pieces that rely more on pattern and texture than pictorial imagery. I'm obsessed



by the tiniest of details. I get excited when I find a new pattern, I play with it and dissect it or try to make it look 'dimensional' or maze-like on the skin. I truly am obsessed.

Although there are many pioneers

within the tattoo world who create dotwork masterpieces, it still is quite rare. I think lots of people outside of the tattoo industry have no concept of it at all. I still get asked, 'is it a real tattoo?' or 'will it last as long as a real tattoo?' or

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY PIONEERS WITHIN THE TATTOO WORLD WHO CREATE DOTWORK MASTERPIECES, IT STILL IS QUITE RARE. I THINK LOTS OF PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF THE TATTOO INDUSTRY HAVE NO CONCEPT OF IT AT ALL



Trent Atken Smith/Ferank • Ferank

'how come it looks so different?'

I did a bit of hunting and research into tattooed dots and was quite pleasantly surprised by what I found. The preserved remains of a Scythian Chieftain, known as the 'Man of Pazyryk', had many tattoos, including a row of tattooed dots down his spinal column. His remains are more than 2,500 years old. There was also a female Egyptian mummy named Amunet (Priestess of the Goddess Hether) who, when unwrapped, had many things tattooed on her skin, including a design on the abdomen, arms and legs that was a series of





TETRASKELION

The most universal and auspicious symbol on this planet is the swastika, or tetraskelion to use a collective term. Almost all cultures and religions have used this symbol over thousands of years. It is a good luck sign and blessing. Swastika patterns and symbols feature heavily in all my art and tattoos. I am a member of the 'Gentle Swastika Collective'. We educate through art, the true meaning of this sacred sign. I recommend you educate yourself regarding this and don't just take my word for it. There are very informative websites, such as www.swastika.blog.com, which are well worth visiting.

'Yungdrung' (the Tibetan word for swastika) translates as 'unchanging well-being' - the most harmonious and purest blessing. When you see swastika symbols within tattoos, please don't be quick to judge negatively, look further and educate yourself. Awareness is key. One of the most decorative swastika patterns is called 'sawagata'. Legend says that this pattern was born from the chest hair of Vishnu. It features heavily in Japanese kimonos and in Chinese and Tibetan art. You will recognise it I'm sure, it is a beautiful pattern to tattoo (especially in dotwork) as are most kimono patterns. The oldest swastika in the United Kingdom is on Ilkley Moor, an Iron Age rock carving known as the 'Swastika Stone'.

When I tattoo swastika designs, I see it as the ultimate good luck blessing. In my heart, I hold no negativity towards this most sacred of all signs and hope to reclaim its innocence for the future.



dots and lines forming a pattern; her remains are 4,000 years old. That's quite a long time, 4,000 years, since the first known dotwork tattoo. It seems that, as a tradition, tattooing with dots is older than I had imagined.

Creating pictures out of a multitude of dots clearly isn't a new art form. In

I AM A REAL SUCKER FOR HISTORY AND TRADITIONS.
I ALWAYS HAVE BEEN

the 1880s, pointillism was championed in oil paintings by the French neo-impressionist, Georges Seurat. His pictures, on closer inspection, were said to have a shimmering effect.

Samuel O'Reilly patented the first electric tattoo machine in 1891. So, dotwork and tattooing in dots is much older than machine tattooing - a lot older. The facts speak for themselves. Tattooed dots have a very interesting past dating all the way back to the early Egyptians.

I am a real sucker for history and tradition, I always have been. One of the oldest tattoo rituals that I know of, is the giving and receiving of 'love dots', a ritual practised in ancient Japan; when an emperor fell in love with one of his courtesans, they were forbidden to marry because of their class system, so they met secretly and marked each other on the hand with a solitary tattooed dot that would seal their love forever. When the emperor then walked among the line of his many courtesans greeting them, he placed his thumb on the tattooed dot, with her doing the same placing her thumb on his dot and gazing into each other's eyes. This small acknowledgement was as much as they could show in public of their secret love

for each other. The dot was often placed between the thumb and the forefinger allowing for quite a discreet and secret handshake. A really powerful and beautiful dot tattoo I think.

And we can't really talk about dots and tattoos without mentioning the 'Borstal dot'. That one tiny dot on the face told a story, whether you understood the code or not. In my





area, a dot tattoo on each knuckle was a coded way of saying, ACAB (All Coppers Are Bastards) and rejecting authority, but to the untrained eye it just looked like four dots. Still to this day, the street gangs of East L.A. and Mexico tattoo three dots in a triangular form to represent 'Ma Vida Loca' (My Crazy Life) – a dedication to their gang and lifestyle.

My personal relationship with dots began a long time ago. In the '80s, I used to promote and organise a psychedelic club night and festival called Club God. I used to hand-draw elaborate, psychedelic posters and flyers to promote the events. The posters were only monochrome photocopies, so I relied on the intricacies and textures of the dotwork to make the posters more interesting – I used to get lost in those dots. The posters would get stolen so often, before the gigs had even happened, that I had to do multiple poster runs. It was a labour of love for

me at the time. I was in a psychedelic rock band myself and in between gigging, rehearsing and promoting, I was always drawing each poster. Trying to outdo the previous one with its tripped out fonts and dots. The fact that they took forever to draw didn't bother me, I found it relaxing. The repetition of drawing with dots can become quite hypnotic, but in a nice way! It's almost like tantric drumming. Sometimes while drawing like this I would kind of lose myself and end up in a bit of a trance, I love this feeling. And this was just drawing, I wasn't even tattooing yet, but it was a feeling of being un-focused and focused at the same time.

With the posters, the main thing I was trying to achieve was that the more you examined it, the more you would find new things to look at. This is really

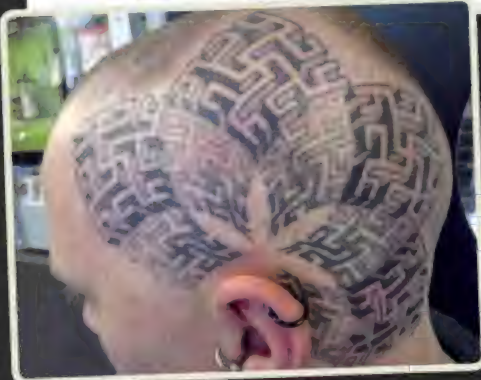
the beauty and the quality of dots for me. They allow you to dissemble the form to each singular dot, as if it's alive. Like fleeting dust particles, intricate, delicate, and bloody millions of them!

Dots on paper look nice, but dots 🙄



on the skin look amazing! My needle is much finer than my pen. When tattooing dots into the skin, I have a rhythm and pattern to my work that I prefer and the music playing often suits the tempo for my dotting. If I have a large piece of dot shading to do, I prefer to play fast music and follow the beat. It gets the job done quicker! Slow music can really slow me down and there have been times where I've had to change the tempo of the music to get finished in a reasonable time. Dotwork takes time, you can see it in each individual dot.

So I guess we have established I have a genuine love for the dots and also for tattoo. My other great love is pattern. Every pattern I see, my head tries to make it into dots, thinking of the different ways to shade it giving me myriad possibilities. Most things can be translated into dots if they are approached with that intention. I think back to the newspapers of my youth and how it fascinated me to examine the photographs with a magnifying glass to see the collections of dots. The dots weren't visible at first glance when you looked in the newspaper, you only saw the image. The more the dots grouped together, the darker the area became. It seemed like a magic trick to me. Like a secret not everybody knew. I would often be heard to say, 'it's all made from dots you know!' whilst pointing at a



newspaper picture.

(I won't spoil the flow of Ferank, but I managed to move a few leavers at this point and we got to talking about tattooing in the style...)

I had a consultation with a guy recently who was a bass guitarist. He had a tattoo on his arm that was a sort of 'tribal' design with a bendy guitar within it. He liked my portfolio and gave me the freedom to come up with an idea

for a nice tattoo for his other arm. His only stipulation was that it needed to include a bass clef symbol somewhere within the design.

I had the idea of how bass resonates, being represented by a pattern form in my head. I pictured the bass resonating, making the pattern distort and invert and move. I have a huge collection of repeating

pattern forms on file. I scoured them until I found a suitable pattern, then I distorted it using a paint programme on the PC. I presented the idea to the client as line-work, but explained it would all be shaded in dots. I promised I would make it nice for him.

The design, I explained to him, is the resonance of bass. The pattern is being moved by the depth of its throb, with the bass clef floating above it. I think it's a nice tattoo with lots of detail and I hope it shows my passion for the dots. My client adores it, which is the most important thing. The whole tattoo was made from dots, everything you see here, even the lines, are created from dots. I put them in a dot at a time and dots join to become lines.

I can tattoo beautiful lines out of dots. Do they still count as dotwork tattoos? Obviously in my mind they are still dotwork. I made the lines from dots even if it isn't necessarily evident. And with a combination of dots and lines you can create anything! I could create tattoos worthy of an Egyptian Priestess.

Aha! I hear you cry. But they didn't have tattoo machines in Ancient Egypt. It is at this point that I laugh a hearty laugh and smile a cheeky grin and reveal that I tattoo without machines. It is all by hand. Every single dot. Bloody millions of them. But that is another story...

SACRED GEOMETRY

There are five platonic solids. They are the tetrahedron, cube (or hexahedron), octahedron, dodecahedron and icosahedron. They were first discovered by the Ancient Greeks. Their forms are the models of crystal pattern that occur within the world of minerals in their many variations. To the Greeks, they represented fire, earth, air, spirit (ether) and water respectively. Their belief was that the platonic solids formed the foundation for everything in the physical world.

This idea was ridiculed by modern science until the 1980s when Professor Robert Moon demonstrated that the whole periodic table of elements, everything we know in the physical world, truly is based on these five geometric forms.

The flower of life is a design of interlocking circles that appears to make flowers within the form. It was etched on the temple walls of the Osirion at Abydos, Egypt. It is a lot more than a pretty pattern, within its form it can perfectly contain all five platonic solids. From a mathematic/geometric point of view, it is very clever. These patterns and forms are part of what we call, sacred geometry. When we understand these forms and the links and connections they make, we start to understand better the interconnections of all things.

A classic example of this is the spiral. Spiral forms are attractive for lots of reasons, but primarily because they are all linked by the same geometric code. The series of numbers, known as the Fibonacci code, goes like this - 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55...

We are always adding the previous number to get the next one. When we draw these ratios on paper, we get the progression of a perfect spiral form. If we study spiral forms within nature, we find they all follow this ratio. It can be seen on seashells, sunflowers and even our very own Milky Way. The spirals connect us whether we know it or not. Interestingly, in humans, the Fibonacci Spiral occurs in our ears. We all have a spiral there, again proving our interconnectedness to all things.

THE REPETITION OF DRAWING WITH DOTS CAN BECOME QUITE HYPNOTIC. IT'S ALMOST LIKE TANTRIC DRUMMING



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PART TWO

PAPERBACK WRITERS

Previously, we looked at some of the celluloid capers that have immortalised ink over the years, and now, just to keep you on your toes, we come back to the humble written word. Once again we've uncovered some weird and wonderful tales that use tattoos as something more than the literary equivalent of a 'Danger! High Voltage!' sign

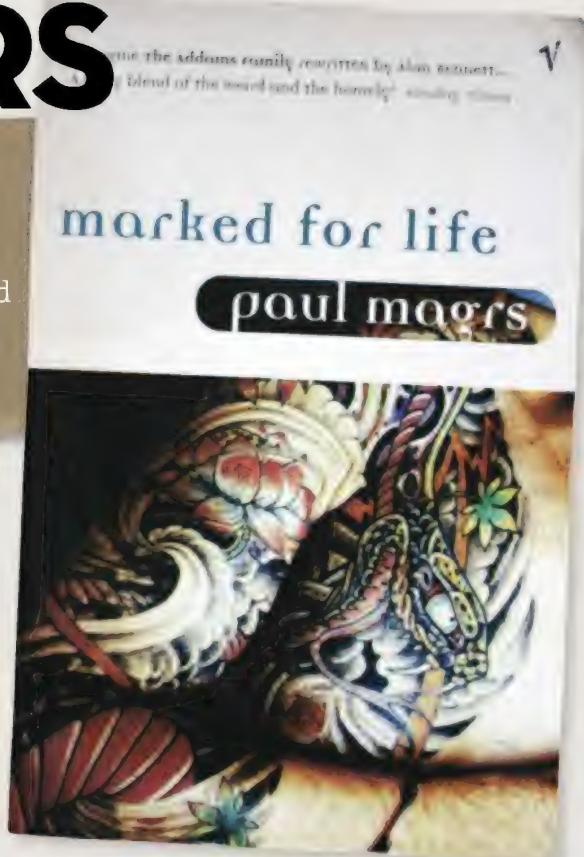
"Show me a man with a tattoo," said novelist Jack London once, "and I'll show you a man with an interesting past." It's an idea that plenty of writers before and since have played with. Rather than consigning inkwork to the box of tricks marked 'baddies', they've brought it to the forefront of the story, employing tattoos as narrative devices or elements that add nuance to their protagonists – even using them as the scene of a crime... but we'll get to that. We've got troubled lovers, yakuza gangsters, four-year-old tattoo artists, and some rogue fish to wade through first; are you sitting comfortably?

MARKED FOR LIFE

PAUL MAGRS

Boy meets girl. They fall in love. Have a child, argue amusingly with the mother-in-law. Get into scrapes. What fun. Except in this case the boy is tattooed head to foot in lurid tribal markings and taking a temporary break from his homosexuality, the mother-in-law has a gay lover who's several hundred years old and the 'scrapes' in question involve kidnaps, car crashes and fatal rooftop plunges.

Although sexuality is a key theme of Paul Magrs' '90s debut (no longer in print but easy enough to



THE LESSER

SPOTTED AUTHOR

Animal Farm and 1984 author, George Orwell, sported tattoos on his knuckles. According to biographer Gordon Bowker, he probably got them in Burma in the late 1920s where he served as an Imperial policeman. The Burmese tribesmen believed that their tattoos gave them magical protection from British bullets, which may explain why the notoriously paranoid writer chose to wear those blue dots – as protection from an establishment he increasingly felt apart from. As it turned out, he wasn't totally wide of the mark: documents released just a few years ago show that the secret service was indeed watching him. Hopefully the tattoos helped him sleep a little better under Big Brother's watchful eye...

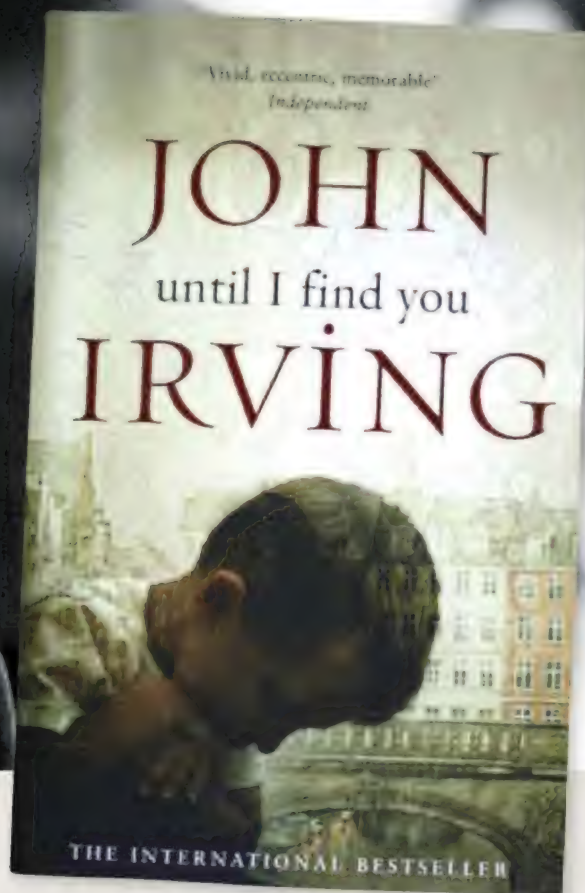
get hold of on Amazon), it's not an 'issues' novel – the writer himself has said that he doesn't set out to create those. Instead, he thinks his major themes are "Outsiders. Magic. Time. Friendship. Love", and that's a pretty accurate synopsis of *Marked for Life*. You get a ramshackle collision of oddball 'outsider' characters (even the five-year-old daughter of our tattooed hero, Mark, is a terrapin thief) all wearing different disguises throughout. There's the obvious one of the man in the full body suit peering out from behind all that ink (or has he merely revealed his true self?), but also the portly centuries-old granny who actually wraps herself in countless layers of jumpers to





Jack London

"SHOW ME A MAN WITH A TATTOO," SAID NOVELIST JACK LONDON ONCE, "AND I'LL SHOW YOU A MAN WITH AN INTERESTING PAST." JACK LONDON



hide her tiny seven-stone frame, to name just two...

It's potentially not one for the squeamish, as Magrs' early bookish preoccupations also include lots of fumbled sexual encounters drenched in multiple bodily fluids ('phlegm-like semen', anyone?). The narrative is equally splattered with alcohol, vomit and blood – and of course a lot of ink – sometimes described in closer proximity than you might like. But then, love can be a bit disgusting up close and the book has enough heart and humour to balance it, while playing around with the consequences of marking ourselves (literally with tattoos, or figuratively with jobs, sexuality and family roles) and the effect it produces on us, and on those around us. Probably quite a

Marmite book, it's worth a look just for its sheer madcap strangeness.

UNTIL I FIND YOU JOHN IRVING

John Irving understands the world of tattoos. The author of *The World According to Garp* and *The Cider House Rules* has a few, for starters – including a maple leaf to honour his Canadian wife and a symbol representing the starting circle of a wrestling match. Did we mention he's also a wrestler? Yup, there's that too. He travelled extensively to research *Until I Find You*, visiting studios and artists all over the world, getting to the point where he was even inking some tattoos himself, on oranges first and then on fresh fish (flounders, for all the fish fanciers out there) before finally trying his

needle skills on people. The fish incident makes it into the novel, where the scaly hide is described as 'the closest approximation to human skin' by one of the many artists populating Irving's tale.

And what a tale. It's basically the biography of an actor called Jack Burns, and as you might expect from a tattooed wrestler with a neat line in cerebral comedy, it's an eccentric tome. Much of the novel is spent skipping from studio to studio as young Jack's mother, Alice, a tattoo artist herself, tries to hunt down the boy's father. Daddy, however, is sprinting across Europe chasing church organs, getting choirgirls pregnant and gradually having himself covered in musical notation by artists in every city he visits. As you do. 🍷



John Irving

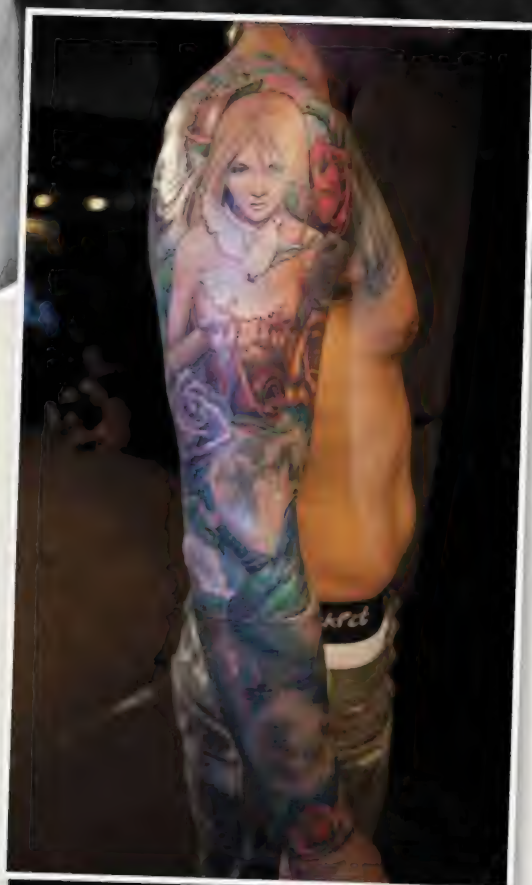
IRVING USES TATTOOS AS HIS
CENTRAL SYMBOLIC DEVICE AND IN
HIS EYES THERE'S NOTHING FIXED OR
CERTAIN ABOUT AN INKED IMAGE

So Alice and Jack roam through Norway, Finland, the Netherlands and beyond trying to catch up with him. On the way they meet great artists, both real and imagined – a version of Sailor Jerry pops up at one point – while Alice plies her trade in studios and illicitly in hotel rooms to finance their fruitless quest. Four-year-old Jack himself wields the needle, covering up two former lovers' names on the ankle of an apprentice artist (the end result 'looked as if many small animals had been butchered', unsurprisingly).

Irving uses tattoos as his central symbolic device and in his eyes there's nothing fixed or certain about an inked image. "The tattoo is ephemeral, it disappears with the person who bears it," he once said in an interview, and in *Until I Find You*, he really takes that idea and runs with it. The mangled cover-up Jack does is just one nod to the potential evolution of a tattoo design over the wearer's life, transforming letters into petals and hiding whatever the original motivation for the tattoo was, even if it's still buried under

there somewhere. It's an allegory for memory, of how we constantly edit and recompose our past and how what we remember can be unreliable, or not as it seems at first. Alice's speciality tattoo is a Rose of Jericho, an ornate flower concealing a rather different image within its folds, hinting that the life Jack recalls may also be covering something else entirely.

On top of all this though, it's a funny novel peopled with great characters. Irving does a neat job of quickly sketching memorable artists in the studios of Europe, for example – the cheery Doc Forest sports both a moustache and 'forearms like Popeye's', while creepy Jacob Brill gives only blood curdling religious tattoos and is 'an austere skeleton of a man'. But Irving is also great on tattoos. As well as driving his story onwards, his studios feel real and his tattoos are all old school, unashamedly symbolic and underscored by heartbreak – there's no tattoo just for the hell of it here. Ripped hearts, Man's Ruin, snakes and daggers and sailing ships (the perfect questing symbol chasing Jack and

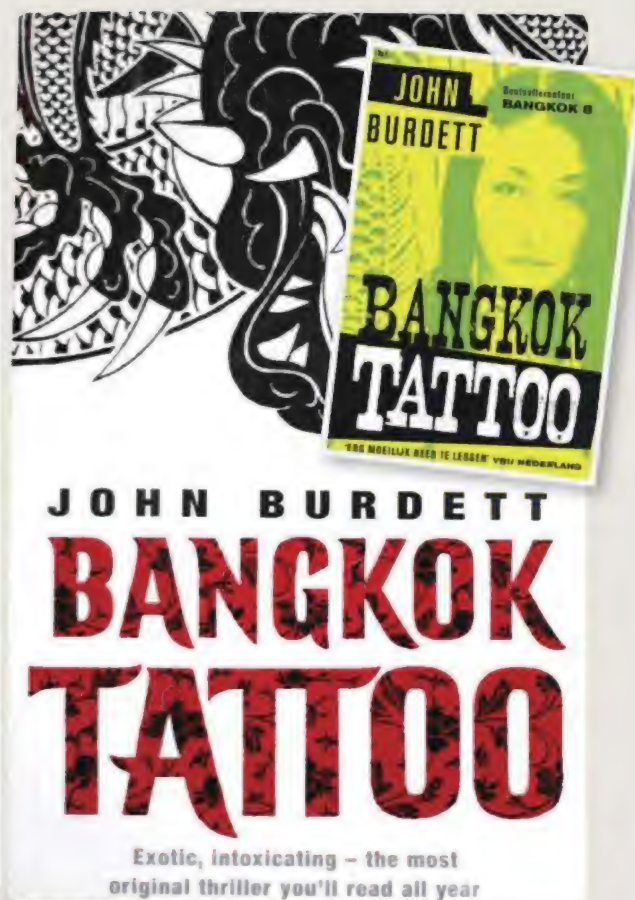


Alice everywhere) abound, each one rendered by a writer who's clearly been under the needle and knows exactly which bits hurt. With tattoos, as we all know, that can be both physical and emotional: that memorial tattoo on your chest hurts when needle hits rib, but it also smarts as you think of why you're getting it. And then that changes over time, as you grow older and your recollections fade just as the tattoo settles into your skin.

Randy Engelhard, *Heaven of Colours*, Germany

Burdett's novel is the second to feature his unique take on the noir-ish homicide detective, Buddhist gumshoe, Sonchai Jitpleecheep, and is a furious sprint through the heaving underbelly of Bangkok that begins with a dead American stabbed in the stomach by a hooker, and just gets more cheerful from that point onwards. Corrupt generals and drug dealers turn out to be one and the same, crazed CIA agents dash about in the wrong direction and the body count keeps rising, while Sonchai must juggle his Buddhism with running his mother's whorehouse and mentoring a cop partner who would rather be a ladyboy.

Into all this comes the Japanese tattoo artist Sonchai must hunt. Why is he important? No one knows... but they do know he's a master of horimono who learned his trade needling yakuza bosses until he became a true master.



NOT FOR BURDETT, THE SENSITIVE HEARTBREAK OF IRVING'S MISBEGOTTEN LOVERS OR THE QUIRKY IDENTITY CRISIS OF MAGRS' PROTAGONIST. HIS TATTOOS ARE HAMMERED IN BY HAND

Irving's tattoos all move, shifting and flexing with the body just as memory and sentiment shifts over time, which makes *Until I Find You* consistently fascinating, unpredictable and delightfully odd. For this author, there are no insignificant tattoos: "Tattoos are souvenirs," he once told the *New York Times*, "they're road maps of where your body's been."

BANGKOK TATTOO

JOHN BURDETT

If the smoke and mirrors of Irving's fiction or the gooey dysfunction of Magrs' storytelling don't do it for you, what you need is a shot of Burdett. *Bangkok Tattoo* will get you hammered then punch you in the face and hold your head down the toilet, all the while explaining in placid Buddhist terms why you bloody well deserve it. Sound good? It is.

Alas, inking one of them on the forehead while he was passed out from saké turned out to be a mistake, so the elusive artist is on the run, somehow mixed up in the trail of increasingly bloody violence Sonchai follows.

Not for Burdett, the sensitive heartbreak of Irving's misbegotten lovers or the quirky identity crisis of Magrs' protagonist. His tattoos are hammered in by hand, the artist working his tebori needle 'as if it were a long chisel'; and all are fiercely beautiful. There's a laudable motive beneath the murk, though, for Burdett's artist ('Let's call him Ishy', quips Sonchai in a piquant reference to the opening line of that other notable tattoo-sporting classic, *Moby Dick*) sees the tattoos people should have, rather than the ones they think they want. He's trying to save them from the obvious, the empty 'degrading

clichés of his trade' and create something meaningful on their skin. His art 'was not an offshoot of graffiti,' observes Sonchai, 'but part of the great ink drawing tradition of Hokusai.' It's more than a little erotic too, both in application and in the look of the finished product; the artist himself even sports a representation of a sea battle that is only fully revealed when he's, well... standing to attention.

While the frequent collisions of high ideals and lower realities give *Bangkok Tattoo* a seedy allure peppered with tasty irony, what's even more shocking than the sex and drugs and violence is the ultimate treatment of the tattoos, which are in many ways the crime scene in this tale. We don't want to spoil the ending though, so you'll have to read on with disgust and delight to find out why so many tattooed bodies are showing up missing important features, and to discover the truth about the artist, who while neither devil nor messiah, is most definitely a naughty boy. You'll learn a bit about Buddhism too, which is always nice. 🐼

OTHER TATTOO TALES

The Fifteen Dollar Eagle by Sylvia Plath

'Wear your heart on your skin in this life,' brogues Carmey, the tattooist in Plath's short story set in a tattoo parlour - a line that many have gone on to immortalise in their own tattoos.

Under their Skin by Dinah Lee Küng

In a reversal of our usual fare, Shino visits Roman the dermatologist to have his irezumi removed, attempting as he sees it to reclaim his life and 'emerge from his Purgatory almost a different man.'

In the Penal Colony by Franz Kafka

Typical Kafka themes surface in this short story of inexplicable rules and horrifying disregard for human life. A bizarre instrument of torture tattoos its sentence onto the condemned before killing them. Not one to read before your next trip to the studio, perhaps.



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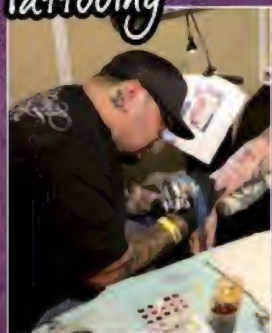
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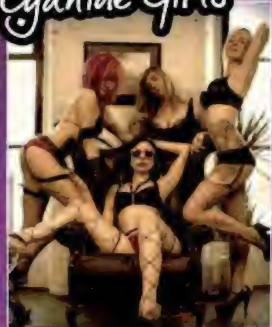
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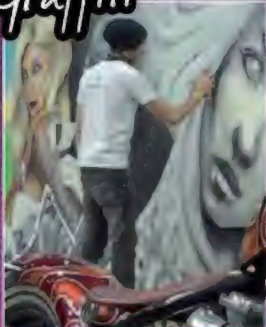
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BRUSSELS

The International Brussels Tattoo Convention is a new player on the European tattoo scene. The organiser, Kim, a Dutchman living in Brussels, worked for Henk Schiffmacher, has a great eye for the artistic side of tattooing, and this convention's second outing can certainly be characterised as one with a great standard of tattooing

With big names like Khan, Andy Engel, Victor Portugal, Tin Tin, Adriaan Machete, Calypso, Seth Wood and Carlos Rojas on the bill, Kim has also added a rockabilly atmosphere.

The huge venue of Tour & Taxis is located in the centre of Brussels; it's a beautiful location with artistic qualities in itself, which, during the event, was not only enhanced by the tattoo artists but also by colourful hotrods and motorbikes as well. With top artists from across the globe, the selection process was hard this time around: "Every year has to be different, renewing. I want to show people the power of tattooing," Kim explains. "But I do not select only on the basis of names, rather on the quality of the work; I am open to unknown artists."



EVERY YEAR HAS TO BE DIFFERENT,
RENEWING. I WANT TO SHOW PEOPLE THE
POWER OF TATTOOING

THE CITY ITSELF

Brussels is the home of Impressionist painters like Anna Boch from the Artist Group Les XX. The city is also a capital of the comic strip; some treasured Belgian characters are Lucky Luke, Tintin, Cubitus, Gaston Lagaffe and Marsupilami. Throughout the city, walls are painted with large motifs of comic book characters. The totality of all these mural paintings is known as the Brussels' Comic Book Route. Also, the interiors of some Metro stations are designed by artists. The Belgian Comics Museum combines two artistic leitmotifs of Brussels, being a museum devoted to Belgian comic strips, housed in the former Waucquez department store, designed by Victor Horta in the Art Nouveau style.

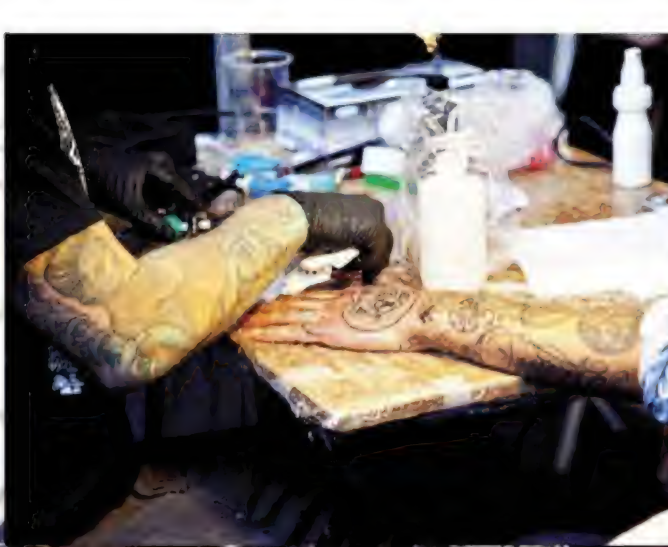
MIGOII, ANDY ENGEL AND ANDREAS AFFERNI

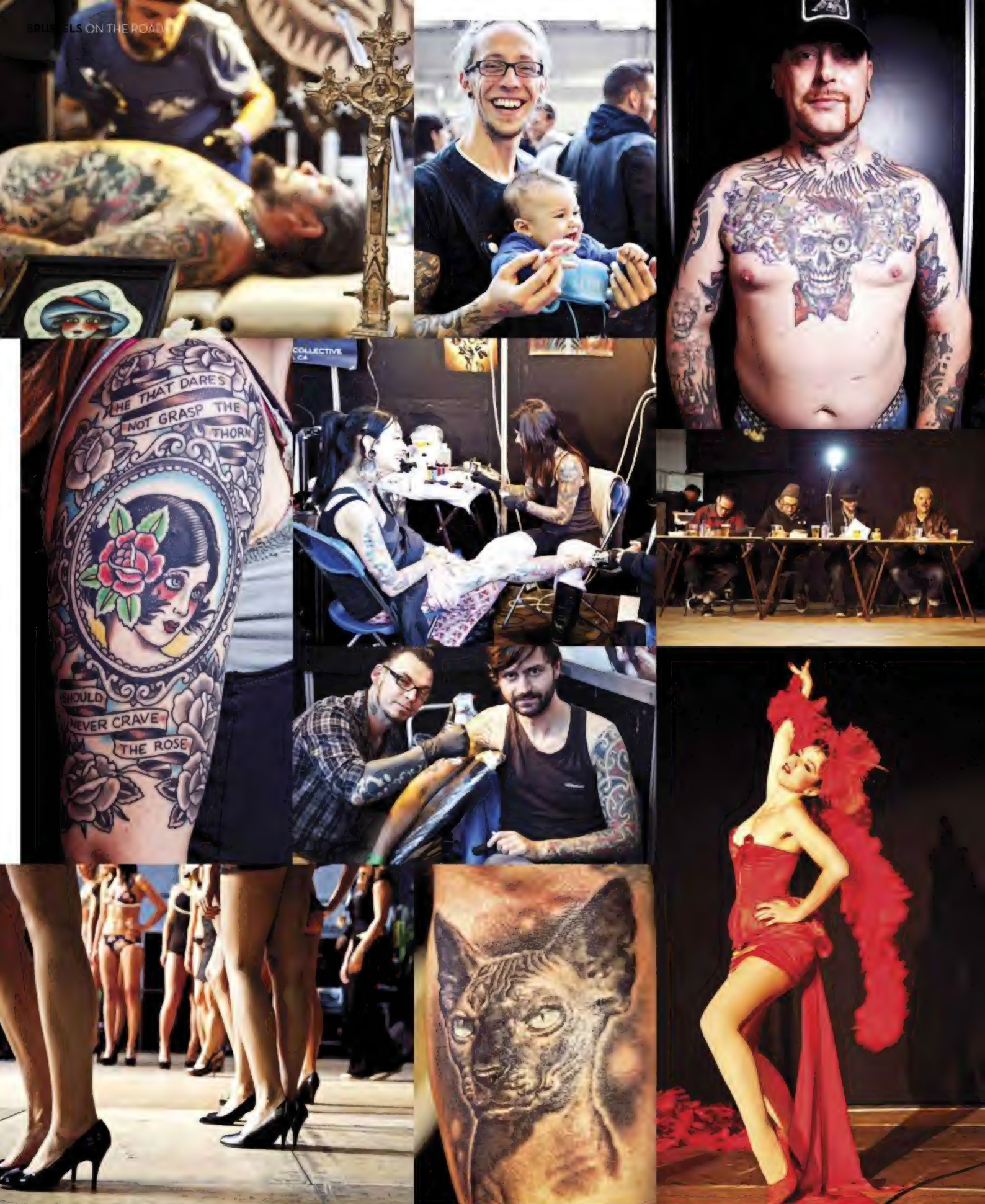
The Vietnamese artists from Migooi travelled from their hometown of Paris to Brussels. Their entire weekend was spent tattooing a huge samurai on the back of Morgan, a Belgian customer. I follow the process by passing the booth now and then watching the tattoo come slowly alive. The work of the travelling artist, Khan (South Korea), is incredible – he currently has a guestspot at the studio of Andy Engel in Kitzingen. Bibi from Belgium shows me the portrait that Andy has tattooed on her left upper arm. "That's me," she says. "The tattoo is linked to the portrait of my daughter. One part Andy tattooed during the London Convention, here he finished the tattoo." Andy shares his booth with another master in portrait art, Andreas Afferni (Novara, Italy). The face of a woman with a black tear is simply wonderful. 🌸



Rik Van Beekel © Cindy Frey

Kim points out Anabi and Agrypa from Poland, a female artist from Krakaw, who tattoos in Victor Portugal's 9th Circle studio showing his absurdist dark style tattoos in a booth beside Miguel Ramos (Peru). Also, artists from California share a booth with each other like Christina Garcia, Alan Padilla and Carlos Rojas (Black Anchor). José Lopez is also present, and as usual, Jack Ribeiro (nowadays tattooing in Luxemburg City) and Milosch (Czech Republic) share a booth; they always travel together to conventions. Just like the Mexican artist, Adriaan Machete and his countryman, Iban (Für Immer. Berlin).





LEAFMAN, GOD OF THE DANCE

From Belgium, I see artists like Dan Di Mattia (Calypso), Wildtrash, Tattoo Studio Frank, Boucherie Modern, Tendre Furie, Spitfire and Body Adornments; from the Netherlands Thomas Kynst, Skin-atomic, Schiffmacher and Veldhoen, Tattoo Mania, Inkstitution and Leslie Reesen (Mad Science). Barbara from The Hague wears a black and grey backpiece from Leslie. "Near my shoulder, you see the Leafman. In Wicca, he is the God of dancing and I am a dancer, but I found out the significance only after Leslie tattooed me."

Mehdi (Bunker Tattoo, Breda) also tattoos in Brussels. Debbie, a fan of the Def Americans, a Johnny Cash tribute band – who play on the Sunday at the convention – shows me a sleeve of



THERE IS MUCH MORE ENTERTAINMENT LIKE A LINGERIE FASHION SHOW WITH SUICIDE GIRLS EUROPE AND A FANTASTIC BURLESQUE SHOW WITH FEMALE DANCERS FROM DIFFERENT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

colourful flowers that Mehdi tattooed on her arm. There is much more entertainment like a lingerie fashion show with Suicide Girls Europe, and a fantastic burlesque show with female dancers from different European countries; both shows attracted much attention from the audience.

DIMITRI SAMOHYN, SETH WOOD AND DAN GOLD

After one of the shows, I see a most peculiar tattoo; Dimitri Samohyn from Odessa, Oekraïne, tattooed images from Red Indian portraits on the back of Evelynne from Antwerp. "I have travelled three times to Odessa," she tells me. "You see many native American motifs with animals. The main themes are freedom, faith, strength, belief in yourself and in life. The images are based on portraits of Red Indians by a painter from Colorado, USA, Kirby Sattler." I see more incredible work while checking out Seth Wood, who is tattooing a cuckoo clock on the left underarm of psychiatrist Eric from Sweden; Dan Gold tattoos images of a wooden robot and Popeye the sailor; Pete Radulyke, Glasgow, tattoos a Chinese goddess of mercy backpiece

on Pole, Magdalena, who enters it in Saturday's Best of Day category, just like Patrick who had an amazing tattoo from Jim Sylvia (Unbreakable Tattoo, USA) – two fish with fishbones above both his knees symbolizing life and death. Jorre (Glorybound, Antwerp) wins Saturday's Best Chestpiece with a tattoo full of zombies; Mr.Greg (Rock & Roll Tattoo Studio, Edinburgh) wins Best American/ Old School and Best of Day with a tattoo of an oil-lamp. Alex Wuillot (Le Main Blue, Belgium) wins Sunday's Best Color; José Lopez Best Black and Grey; and Best of Sunday is for the beautiful skull tattooed by Kostas, Dirty Roses (Greece). Eva (Candy Cane/ Lady Luck, Netherlands) wins Best of Show with a tattoo on her left underarm. The tattoo is made by Crispy Lennox, an Australian artist who tattoos in London. "It's a mix of new traditional and realism," Eva tells me. "I am fascinated by the women with black tears of Crispy; you can see a snake, my Chinese sign, and an apple, is appropriate because of my name."

Next year there are plans to make the convention even bigger and with a change of focus – not rockabilly, but old school!!



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I'm opening a bigger studio of Krisp Ink just outside Wolverhampton and am looking to rent space to a tattooist. The space will be ready to start work by April, so please get in touch 07817 911734, krispoole20@yahoo.com.

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Skins & Needles: tattoo artist required for busy town centre location in Middlesbrough, Cleveland, located close to Teesside university. We are looking for somebody with studio experience, a strong portfolio, friendly personality and reliable, to replace one of our artists who is emigrating. No rock stars please. Applicants to email portfolio to thesalvins@live.com.

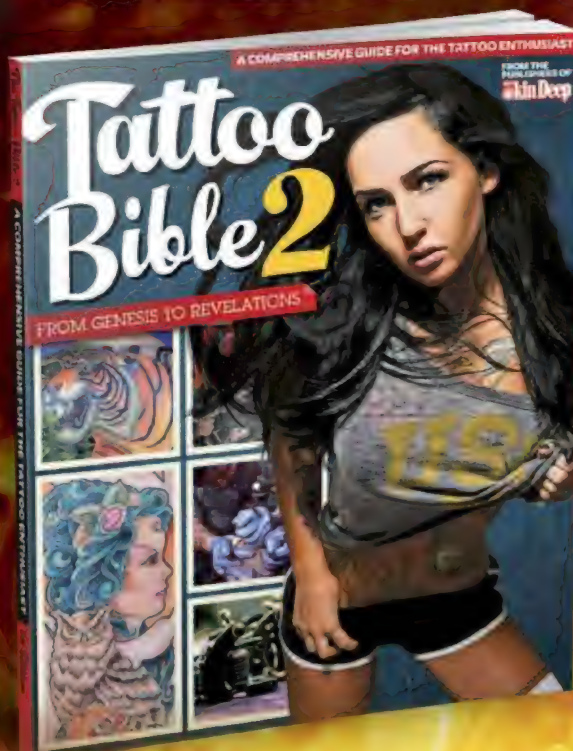
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Established Tattoo Artist Required: Doc Black Ink are looking for an outstanding artist to occupy a chair at our brand new tattoo and piercing Studio in Gateshead, Tyne & Wear. This will be a prime earning opportunity for the successful applicant, as the studio is located in the Metrocentre – Europe's largest shopping & leisure centre. We offer flexible hours, creative freedom and an air-conditioned studio, equipped with all the latest equipment. A minimum of three years studio experience and an excellent portfolio are essential. A loyal customer base is desirable. Applicants must be confident, have a positive attitude, be reliable, self-motivated and willing to work to the highest standards in the industry. Please email your CV and portfolio to enquiries@docblackink.co.uk for consideration.

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Letter
of The
Month



One less for the kiddie grinder

I've just read the editorial of issue 209 and it's uncanny how it parallels my recent decision to withdraw from Facebook and Twitter. I too originally joined for the fun factor. Somehow over time though it has become an extension of the Jeremy Kyle show, and in no way do I mean this to be a positive comment. I suffer Chronic Fatigue and with the rigours of it, depression too, so it was all too easy to lose myself in 'social' media instead of engaging in real life. Happily though I'm regaining my focus and tackling my condition again without this distraction. It's onwards and upwards. The only downside I now feel is that I don't necessarily have access to unlimited great tattoo work at my finger tips. But to draw a positive from this, it has made the anticipation of each issue of Skin Deep an even greater excitement each month.

One final note regarding one of the Melanie's letters from this issue, the 'Addicted to pain' letter. I agree with her sentiment and wholeheartedly agree with your response. Tattoos should be very much for the art, but also there is nothing quite

as exhilarating as the sensation of being tattooed. To me it's the feeling of being alive and almost a passage of rights to wear the ink with pride. Keep up the great work. All the very best,

Kieron Crenne formerly of Facebook and Twitter

You said it bro!

Scary Times

I don't know if you remember, but I sent a letter to you with regards to Scary Guy and bringing his programme into the school where I work? Never in a million years did I expect to see it published in the December edition of Skin Deep, very exciting, nor did I expect it to be letter of the month with the promise of a dip in the Skin Deep lucky bag. My tattooist, Gold Frank, brought it to my attention, despite me having bought the edition on release and missed my letter – too many wonderful pieces of artwork distracted me.

After several months, my school have agreed to go ahead and have provided most of the funds to pay for Scary's programme. I am in the process of working with the school's enrichment leaders to develop fundraising activities to get us to the grand total – as a lover of zombies, I can not get past the idea of a zombie zumba day! I cannot say again how thankful I am to you and your team at Skin Deep for publishing the article. I shall keep you posted about further developments as read in your response to your letter.

Kylie

It's a pleasure... let us know what happens, take some pictures and notes and ship them on in. A first-hand write-up would be great.

An Addict writes:

I have a friend that is writing a book on addictions, many of which he has experienced first-hand. However, as he has never been tattooed, and this is one of the categories in the book,



@Kirstytelling: "my little lady is reading @SkinDeepMag January 2011, issue 193 as her bed time reading. She's only 5."

@ClnJee: "Just nearly dropped my @SkinDeepMag in the bath not a good idea reading it here after all xx #DumbSometimes"

@pauljsweeney: "My 1st article in @SkinDeepMag... take that English GCSE results!!"

@paulstevenson13: "@SkinDeepMag my son just got me the new magazine for my birthday lol great stuff. hes got good taste"

@hayleypooh29: "@SkinDeepMag downloaded the iPad app and this month issue love it x"

@ryan2skipper: "@SkinDeepMag reading through chillaxing on a sunday night #epic"

@5up3rk3tchup: "Limited Edition @SkinDeepMag again this month! Sweetest! #SD-CoverHunt"

@tripodio0121: "@SkinDeepMag having teeth out in hospital. but issue 209 has made me feel loads better waiting to go down!"

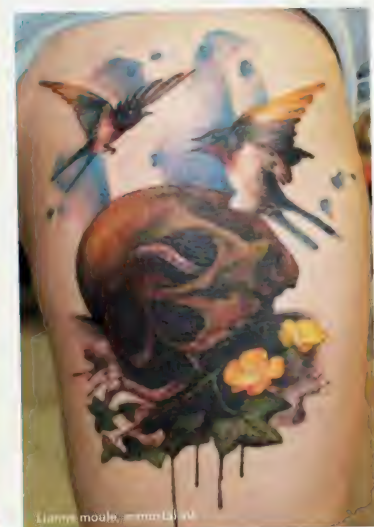
he asked for my opinion. I struggled to give him an answer. Why do some of us become addicted to tattoos? After all, let's be honest, it bloody well hurts!

Although we know this, when we see someone else being tattooed, we don't think, 'oh poor you', we actually think, 'I wish that was me'. I asked my tattoo artist her view and she said that perhaps it's because after we have one, other parts of the body look bare and we feel a need to fill these spaces with more ink. Very plausible. More than I could come up with anyway.

I guess firstly we need to establish what the addiction is to – the sitting in the chair and being tattooed, or the feeling we get once it has been completed (either immediately or in the weeks and months afterwards)? If it is actually having the tattoo done, then it must be some kind of addiction to pain. If however, it is the feeling we get when we take our first look in the mirror at our new tattoo, it could come down to the 'feel good factor'. As a personal trainer I know that people get addicted to exercise largely because of the endorphins that get released after training. Perhaps this is a similar thing. In truth, I really don't have a clue, but found the question an interesting one.

Dave

Once again, we throw the issue open to the readership. Can anybody put their finger on the pulse of the question? Would be great to get those scientific and psychological responses rolling in.

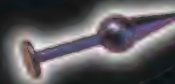


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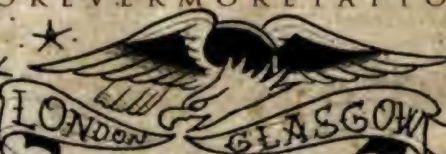
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Reviews

EVERY NOW AND THEN, WE LIKE TO WIDEN THE SCOPE OF THE THINGS WE LIKE TO SEE AND PLAY WITH ON THE REVIEWS DESK. IF IT'S COOL, BRING IT ON! SOUNDS FAIR TO US...



THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO

SONY PICTURES

It's a crying shame that the English speaking world never really got up to speed with the ability to read subtitles. The original, directed by

Niels Arden Oplev and featuring the iconic Noomi Rapace as Lisbeth Salander, is a far superior piece of work delving as it does, not only into the characters of Lisbeth and Mikael Blomkvist, but also deeper into the dark underbelly of the politics of the film which is the backbone of the plot.

But remade for an English speaking audience it was, and despite these shortcomings is actually a pretty good stab at retaining at least the spirit of the original, and even more importantly, the spirit of the book. Thankfully, Daniel Craig does not appear as 'James Bond doing something else' which is certainly a testament to his acting ability, but even though Rooney Mara is acceptable in the part, she is no match for Noomi's original.

If you've never seen (or read) the original, there is a lot to recommend this movie in isolation, but damn, that dragon tattoo could have been awesome. As it is, it's just kind of 'there' because the title of the project says it should be – which pretty much sums the movie up.

It will be interesting to see how the remainder of the trilogy shapes up from Fincher considering the entire Swedish trilogy was released in less than a three-year period – the whole story is so much more than simply this first installment.



WITH THE LIGHT OF TRUTH

Pages: 256 Price: \$50 US

Publisher: Memento Publishing

www.WithTheLightOfTruth.com

Yes, yes, I know, one should never judge a book by its cover, but when the tome in question is made of black gold-embossed canvas, I say judge away!

Dan Smith's newly released *With the Light of Truth* is the culmination of months spent reaching out to some of the world's greatest straight edge tattoo artists, and is as enchanting as its glimmering gold-trimmed pages.

For each of the 60 tattooers featured, you'll be treated to shots of the artist's handi-tattoo-work, straight edge-inspired flash-like artwork and a mini interview about life, the craft and the choice to be straight edged.

With the Light of Truth helps shine light (pun only slightly intended) on what it means to make this lifestyle choice, which includes refraining from the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. As Smith explains in his forward, 'What started as a subculture and backlash from the typical self-destructive ways of the early '80s punk rock scene has become a cherished and positive movement.'

Just a few of the artists you'll come across within the book's pages are Mario Desa, Rodrigo Botero, Ollie XXX and Seth Campbell. And, at the very end, there's even a travel journal to collect signatures/ personal notes from all of *With the Light of Truth*'s artists.

Great words and great art for anyone ready to be hit with a dose of enlightenment.



T.REX - ELECTRIC WARRIOR - 40TH ANNIVERSARY BOX-SET

UNIVERSAL

Here's a great little slice of retro for all you old timers and smart people out there

If you're not already familiar with it, you should be thoroughly ashamed of yourself, for it changed the face of music from the day it was released right up to tomorrow and as far into the future as you care to look. The bigger question perhaps is how many times can you re-release an album on which every track is deeply engrained in the public psyche?

Well, in this instance, one more time is just fine. There's a time and a place for your old vinyl, and it's at home. On the other hand, slip this remixed disc into your car and it takes it to a whole new level of warmth. Throw in the bonus tracks in the shape of all the single B-sides from the album and we're in serious business – but that's not what you'll be buying this for.

The real meat of this 40th anniversary set is in the addition of disc two. 21 demos and outtakes that include home recordings, unfinished works, album try-outs and instrumentals. Think about it – an acoustic home demo of *Get It On?* The initial fumbblings of *The Motivator?* Total gold-dust back then

and in the years that followed, even though much of it has been made available to the eagle-eyed collector already, it's a bit of a treat to have it all in one package, especially sandwiched as it all is here between Marc's *Electric Warrior* poem and the poem/U.S. radio advert. Any fan will be kicking themselves if they miss out on this Deluxe Edition package.

Unless of course you're an uber-fan and decide to check out the Limited Edition Super-Deluxe item – which includes all the above, comes in a neat box-set and also features a DVD of rare and unreleased TV shows and promos.

And just when I thought all my birthdays had come at once, here comes the killing joke – a forthcoming "even more limited edition than the other limited edition" box-set containing four vinyl singles with unique sleeves and a fine amount of unreleased material backing them up. I've not seen these yet (ahem), but if it's had as much thought put into it as the rest of the package, T. Rex re-releases will never be the same again.

An eye is upon you

STYLE COUNSEL

"Fashion changes, only style remains the same." *Coco Chanel*



Paula Hardy Kangelos

What is style? Is it just a noun, a thing, easily identified and described? Or is it also a verb, an action, something that is done? What is stylish? Its etymology is the same, but is it different to style? After all, we can all identify a style, but is stylish altogether more esoteric?

Contemporary tattoo styles are increasingly varied. Improved technology, materials and application along with increasingly informed, talented and art-educated practitioners have facilitated almost continuous innovation. The breadth of our beloved skin art is more apparent now than at any other point in tattoo history.

This era of experimentation and invention is like a time-condensed echo of mainstream 20th century art history. Tattoos, like painting in the 1950s, have come to not just disregard the rule book, but even deny that the rule book ever existed at all. Modernist art is often misunderstood, and understandably so. Modern artists, writers and architects were connected only by philosophy; a belief that the traditions of the past were no longer relevant, a desire to reject the ideology of realism and instead, in the words of the modernist poet Ezra Pound, a compulsion to "make it new".

Traditionally, tattoo art can be split into two distinct style categories, the figurative (the depiction of recognisable objects, animals and people, as seen in Japanese and Western traditional work), and the pattern (surface markings without obviously identifiable content, sometimes with culture specific

spiritual symbolism, sometimes not), and to a certain extent this categorisation can still be made. However, these styles are no longer necessarily kept separate, and additionally, they have been divided and sub-divided into many meta categories.

The classification and labelling of these new or altered styles is not intrinsically necessary, but nonetheless, as with the Cubism or Abstract Expressionist movements of the past, definitions, or characterisations can be helpful, even if, as with most artistic or philosophical terms, no absolutes can be agreed.

THERE IS LITTLE POINT IN BECOMING AN EXPERT IN SOMETHING THAT DOES NOT INTRINSICALLY INTEREST NOR EXCITE YOU.

We've invented terms to express the merging of traditional genres (such as Western tattoo emblems executed with the bold line and monochromatic palette of tribal-like designs, or old school tattoos with realistically shaded elements) and new descriptions for techniques and aesthetics once regarded as unsuitable for skin. We've welcomed the neo prefix to describe the altered directions that traditional Eastern and Western styles now travel, and we substitute blackwork for tribal to acknowledge that pattern and line are now embraced by those who have no tribe.

Our cultural language evolves with the art itself to ensure we can always identify tattoo styles and discuss them with others – but styles are something to be identified, so why is style itself, or more properly, stylishness, so difficult to define?

After all, many tattoo artists are working with images and techniques that can be assigned to each stylistic category, yet comparatively few are recalled and even less are celebrated. While some visibility can be attributed to clever marketing, it cannot be the whole story. Many exceptionally skilled tattooists prefer to concentrate on their work, rather than their public profile, yet we are all still aware of them and their art. Are these extraordinary practitioners those that exhibit not just a celebrated style, but those that possess style itself?

So what is style? What does it mean to be stylish? The dictionary describes style as:
1) A distinctive quality, form or type of something;
2) Fashionable elegance; 3) Beauty,

grace or an ease of manner. In tattoo art all three definitions can be observed; and when all three are illustrated by a single artist, in a single artwork, we recognise the specialness.

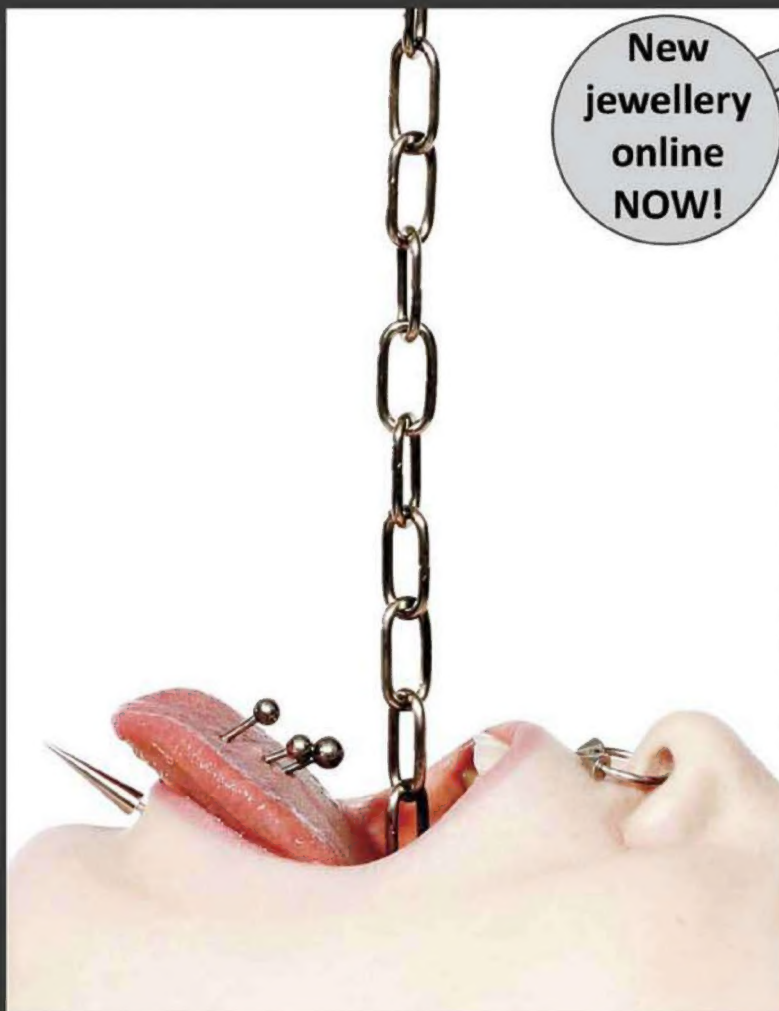
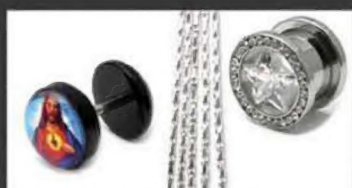
An interesting definition of style is the idea that it is aesthetic integrity or an expression of our best authentic self. There is little point in becoming an expert in something that does not intrinsically interest nor excite you; although accomplishment can be achieved through labour, the achievement will always resonate as hollow, without feeling or belief. It will not touch or even convince others.

Perhaps we should substitute style for soul, and recognise that the artists who leave an impression are those who allow us to glimpse their souls, the essence of themselves. They are the ones who are keeping it real. ✿



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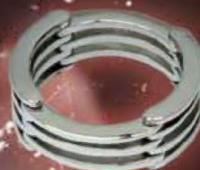
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